

Christian Support for Social Justice

By Steve Sebastian

Introduction

Jesus said, while quoting Leviticus 19:18,

“YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF” (see also Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31).

Should Christians pursue social justice goals within their society, and is that the same thing as loving my neighbor as myself?

What Is Social Justice Exactly?

Wikipedia defines “social justice” as:

A concept of fair and just relations between the individual and society. This is measured by the explicit and tacit terms for the distribution of wealth, opportunities for personal activity, and social privileges.

Webster defines “social justice” as:

A state or doctrine of egalitarianism.

Webster defines “egalitarianism” as:

1. A belief in human equality especially with respect to social, political, and economic affairs.
2. A social philosophy advocating the removal of inequalities among people.

Groups that associate their causes with social justice typically invoke terms like privilege, diversity, discrimination, equality, colonialism, and empowerment to bolster their arguments.

New terms have been coined to better define social justice issues, like “woke” or

“intersectionality.” Intersectionality was added to Webster’s Dictionary in 2017, and refers to:

...the complex and cumulative way that the effects of different forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, and yes, intersect—especially in the experiences of marginalized people or groups.

In an article titled “Americas New Religions,” well-known liberal writer and gay icon Andrew Sullivan provides this candid description of the social justice movement:

Transfixed as we may be by the cult of Trump, the cult of social justice is equally troublesome. It sees the world through the lens of identity politics, and reduces individuals to a collection of fixed attributes such as gender, skin tone, and sexual orientation. Like any good religion, this lens offers a complete explanation of how the world works. It works through an interlocking web of oppression that unfairly elevates white men to positions of undeserved privilege.

[<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/12/andrew-sullivan-americas-new-religions.html>]

Social justice is a liberal progressive movement that attempts to unite the western populations against what they call systemic injustices and prejudices, perpetrated throughout history by privileged white Christian men. They reduce the complex history of western civilization down to one long struggle of disadvantaged people against aggressive, wealthy, white conservative Christian privilege and power. This position allows them argue that a wealthy, black liberal university professor is still a victim, and a struggling blue collar white Christian garbage man is still privileged.

Being an unstructured liberation revolution, it lacks any morally definable civil constitution beyond that of “liberation,” which consequently provides them no means by which to keep, say pedophiles, from gaining social legitimacy within their movement. Once “liberation” has been achieved the system that would fill the social void is anyone’s guess. But the leading contenders are democratic socialism and communism with a dab of angry social anarchy.

Social justice champions efforts such as legalizing marijuana, eliminating free speech, climate change activism, punishing conservative racists, replacing capitalism with communism, reforming the NFL, globalization of everything, social indoctrination through our public education systems, etc. Social Justice has its celebrities like Colin Kaepernick, Greta Thunberg, Bill Gates, Pope Francis, Bernie Sanders, nearly everyone in Hollywood, academia, science, and the news media, just to name a few.

All of these seemingly disconnected social causes, groups, and leaders, find a single and united voice in singling out Christian conservatism as presumably maintaining privilege by upholding a hypocritical system of government that is fundamentally exclusive, immoral, racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.

If you think I’ve overstated the case, here is the Study.com answer to the question, “What is social justice?” Note—The answer, incidentally, was presented as a cartoon informational video designed for school-aged children. Here are a few paragraphs from that video lesson:

Imagine that you have been selected to help design a new society. I know, it sounds a bit outlandish, but hear me out. You’d make sure that there were laws for citizens to follow so that people were not wronged by other individuals. In fact, let’s say that you used much of the same legal inspiration that the founders of the United States used, namely, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

You’d also make sure that there were schools and hospitals for people who needed education or healthcare. In fact, you’d probably also make sure that there were plenty of places of worship, so people who were religious felt at home. In short, you’d want to build institutions that were available to people.

But who would get to use said institutions? Would you limit some groups to only using certain institutions, or only having access to those institutions on certain days of the week? Or, would you completely ban certain groups, saying that you didn’t want them in your society?

Now, if this sort of thing was done by an individual, it would be a crime. After all, it’s illegal to stand in front of a hospital and prevent someone who is gravely injured from having access to a doctor. However, what if it were the hospital itself? This idea that institutions should be freely and equally available to individuals is known as social justice. [<https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-social-justice-definition-issues-examples.html>]

Social Christian Soldiers

A growing number of Christians have begun defending the term social justice and applying it to their community outreach efforts, which causes confusion because few Christian leaders use the term accurately.

In an article posted on churchleaders.com, in August of 2018, writer Megan Briggs commented on some well-known and influential pastors who are making a feeble attempt to connect the mission of the church with the term social justice. She writes:

Tim Keller, founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, argues that “when the world sees the church doing justice, then the world will get interested in justification. They’ll want to know what changed Christians. The answer will be justification.”

Briggs’ aim in this article, however, was not just to promote social justice as a Christian virtue but to specifically denounce John MacArthur’s view of social justice. Why do I believe this was her aim? For one thing, she titled the article “John MacArthur on Social Justice: ‘It’s Heresy,’” and then went on to ridicule MacArthur’s accurate definition of social justice. Here is an example of what she wrote,

John MacArthur’s definition of social justice seems to be something else. He writes, “‘Social justice’ (in the world’s usage of that term) entails political ideas that are deemed sophisticated—namely, identity politics, critical race theory, the redistribution of wealth, and other radical or socialist policies.”

MacArthur’s definition, she writes, seems vastly different from what others understand as “social justice.”

Rather than offer a definition of the term herself, Briggs attempts to justify her attack on MacArthur’s view by quoting Joe Carter of The Gospel Coalition. He writes,

“Whether we use the term or not, Christians are engaged in social justice when we advocate for issues such as abortion, racial reconciliation, religious liberty, and sex trafficking. We engage in social justice whenever we seek moral reform of our society in a way that ensures every person is treated with dignity and given their due.”

[<https://churchleaders.com/outreach-missions/outreach-missions-articles/331815-john-macarthur-on-social-justice-its-heresy.html>] [<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/faqs-christians-know-social-justice/>]

Unfortunately, a growing number of Christians are blind to the true nature of the social justice movement. Regardless, we must all understand that social justice, like other mighty social movements of the past, is dramatically shaping the world around us in real time.

The Power of Social Revolutions

Social justice is having a profound effect on society in much the same way that the sexual revolution did in the 1960s. Have you ever stopped to think about how the sexual revolution of the 1960s has shaped today’s society? The World Atlas has this to say about the sexual revolution or “liberation” movement of the 1960s:

Sexual revolution or sexual liberation is one such movement that is hailed for changing people’s perception about sex and sexual behavior in most contemporary societies today. Sexual revolution aimed at challenging the codes of behaviors that related to sexuality and interpersonal relationships in the Western world. The revolution that started in the 1960s and ended in the 1980s led to the acceptance of other sexual behaviors outside of traditional heterosexual relationships or marriage... The 1960s witnessed the highest number of divorces while the marriage rate decreased significantly. The mass media including television and radio was enabled to broadcast information in a matter of seconds to a large number of people. The media helped to spread the new ideas which were against the traditional sexuality concept.

[<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-was-the-sexual-revolution.html>]

The Social Media Effect

Our social landscape contains an ever-growing list of organized and unorganized social deconstructionists who spread their radical social justice agenda over the vast (and free) platforms of social media. The concepts of social justice have been weaving themselves into the public psyche carefully and effectively through the internet for many years now, slowly and methodically shaping public perceptions and dialogues. Who can deny that the social justice agenda has made quantum leaps thanks to the development of these privately owned, yet pervasive and indispensable, communication technologies?

The primary influences that once persuaded and informed people's opinions and values have shifted away from family members, government, church, and community leaders, and into the hands of Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Twitter, and Apple, among countless others. These companies tout their social justice ideals along with the fact that they are unaccountable to the public or the government. They regularly exploit the public trust and deceive users about important facts. Question: "Hey, Alexa, tell me about Jesus." Answer: "I'm sorry, but I do not know what you mean by 'Jesus.'"

They consistently act above law while taking aim at the businesses, families, and the lives of those who dare to openly stand against their social agendas. Having updated the age-old weapon of social slander and gossip, they incite their sympathetic public to attack their enemies of social justice.

All this has led to an undeniable chilling effect on our culture as we witness the types of vicious campaigns that these groups regularly launch against individuals and businesses (such as Hobby Lobby, Chick-fil-A, the Boy Scouts, a cake baker in Colorado, etc.).

The Struggle for Authority – Breaking the Status Quo

The social justice movement is not simply about social reforms, but social revolution.

A reform aims at improving the status quo by modifying laws, policies and practices, whereas a revolution aims at completely overthrowing the status quo, eliminating the existing order and reinstating a new and improved system;

[<http://www.differencebetween.net/language/difference-between-reform-and-revolution/>]

The social justice, or "woke" community, vehemently opposes the status quo social system concepts of morality and civility, and their mission is liberation from that system by any means possible. "Woke" is a term used as a popular adjective to describe those who consider themselves: "Actively aware of systemic injustices and prejudices, especially those related to civil and human rights." [<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/woke>]

Their progressive ideas of equality and fairness are anti-Biblical, which incidentally, sets it apart from the 1960's Black civil rights' movement. The leaders of that movement fully endorsed a Biblical moral code in society. They were seeking to reform the society's application of the Biblical moral code, not destroy or remove it.

Regardless of how this ever growing struggle for societal authority plays out, the one true authority does not change, and that authority is Jesus Christ. A belief that fortunately still (loosely) unites liberal and conservative evangelicals.

- *Philippians 2:10, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth.*

- Colossians 2:10, ...*He is the head over all rule and authority.*
- Romans 13:1-2, *Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.*

Society and the Institutional Church

One thing that can not be overlooked is the fact that many institutional churches and organizations, both liberal and conservative, have long histories of political involvement, especially during times of social upheaval. When this happens, they leave off their focus as Christ's separated witnesses to the secular society, and begin staking Christian flags within the society. As the church begins to focus on social issues, sound biblical doctrine loses its appeal. They begin to gather teachers around them to support and build upon their newly-adopted Christianized social agendas.

For the time will come when "they" will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Paul warns Timothy that a time will come when the church will not desire sound doctrine, nor the apostles' teaching, but will rather (like the rest of the world) desire to hear new and exciting things. They will gravitate toward teachers who make them feel good and important. They will stop taking the Word to heart and allow their social desires to ruin their appetite for the truth. They will identify with their social agendas more than the truths of Scripture.

It seems to me that a church like that would find it perfectly reasonable to negotiate a foothold within the society if there is a risk of losing social privileges, isolation, and/or persecution, should the society become inhospitable. Is this now beginning to happen in the institutional conservative churches of today?

The Politicizing of Conservative Evangelicals

Up until now, conservative evangelical churches haven't had sufficient reason to become fully immersed into politics, but, as they say, "The times, they are a changin'." With the social justice movement threatening to erase the conservative evangelical perspective from society, the creation of political action groups like "Evangelicals for Trump" seems appropriate, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Conservative evangelical leaders, who had typically shied away from using the pulpit to stump for political candidates, are being urged, like never before, to use their pulpits to safeguard their endangered Christian social agendas by endorsing "Christian" political leaders. And, since a number of evangelical pastors have gained an elevated access to the president (some having been appointed to key roles in advising him), many evangelicals are now convinced that God is providing the church an opportunity to reverse the secular social policies that go against their Christianized social constructs.

On May 4, 2017, the president signed an executive order to stop the IRS from enforcing the Johnson Amendment, a 1954 law that prohibits tax-exempt organizations from "endorsing political candidates and participating in political campaigns, at the risk of losing their nonprofit status." [<https://www.christianheadlines.com/news/what-is-the-johnson-amendment-and-why-did-trump-target-it.html>]

Upon signing the order, President Trump said: “Under my administration, free speech does not end at the steps of a cathedral or a synagogue or any other house of worship. ... We are giving our churches their voices back.”

What “voice” does the president believe he has restored to the churches exactly? Since when has the church needed the mans authority to speak the things Christ has commanded?

Matthew 28:18-20 reads,

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

I suggest that the “voice” the president has given “back” to the church is a voice to speak things that Christ has not approved. Has this decision by the president come at the request of his evangelical board of counselors in order to signal conservative evangelical churches to begin endorsing political leaders? Does this free speech gesture mean that Christ wants the church to become involved in endorsing political candidates and drive political agendas?

I believe that much of the sentiment behind the church’s push to Christianize the culture comes from its general acceptance of the false notion that America is a Christian nation.

Can America Really be a Christian Nation?

All this implying by Christians, that America is a Christian nation, lacks one thing—Christ’s endorsement in Scripture. Where does Jesus ever tell the church to start, or take over a nation? The Bible places all nations into one of two basic categories: Hebrew or Gentile. Only the nation Israel, born of Abraham’s physical seed, can claim to have a unique covenant with God. To suggest otherwise is to know more than the Bible knows.

Assuming that a covenant exists between our nation and God because some Christian concepts were used to form that nation is absurd. If the founding founders believed that the nation they were forming was based on a covenant with God, then why didn’t they form a theocracy instead of a democratic republic?

The Bible tells us that Christ is not focused on building nations, but on building His Church. Jesus said, “*I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it*” (Matthew 16:18).

The Church at a Crossroads

At this point, it appears that conservative churches have gotten themselves in a jam. Do they fully surrender their churches to the political process, in hopes of continuing to exercise power over social morality and civility, or do they walk back their social efforts, recommit themselves solely to spreading the Gospel and teaching a literal understanding of Scripture? That decision would require them to return their universities to Bible schools, their sermons to exegetical expositions, and their community service efforts to missionary outreaches. A third option might be to just continue to float downstream with the culture and eventually stop teaching the Word of God completely.

Many Protestant and evangelical church leaders have already made up their minds and joined to fight the social progressive revolution. They have committed their reputations, resources, and their congregations to supporting the conservative politicians who promise to preserve the

worldly Christian institutional kingdoms they have built. Kingdoms which bear little resemblance to the one Jesus described in John 18:36:

“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”

Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:12, *Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called...* Are these churches and their leaders fighting the wrong fight?

The True Calling of the Church

The church is not called to help preach a message of moral and civil freedom to those in political bondage, *but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

Christians must not forget that Christ Himself, not His church, is Head over earthly authority and He can cause them to change policies, reduce poverty, provide good-paying jobs, or change abortion laws, if it is within His plan to do so. Proverbs 21:1 says, *the king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.*

Christ has not called on His church to challenge the laws of a nation, or hold them accountable for their immorality! He has called the church to spread the Gospel, make disciples, and live holy lives.

I conclude that there is no need, and no basis for Christians to support, or fight against social justice. As God's people, our focus should be to love our unsaved neighbor, first and foremost by identifying their need for Christ's eternal forgiveness and grace. This must not include categorizing them by any artificial classes of race, gender, etc. Loving our neighbor and sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a one-on-one operation which does not require the approval of any human authorities. We must never forget that we are a spiritual and holy separate people unto God.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:9-12)