

Is Social Justice a Biblical Responsibility?

By Jerry Collins

The online “Oxford English Dictionary” supplies a general definition of social justice as “the objective of creating a fair and equal society in which each individual matters, their rights are recognized and protected, and decisions are made in ways that are fair and honest.” [Underline mine, <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=oford+english+dictionary+social+justice&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>] Here we see kernels of a social justice perspective. Namely, social justice promotes fairness and equity societally, each person matters in terms of their rights being protected, and those rights are preserved through fair and honest means. At first glance, these ideas underpinning social justice seem reasonable. What makes social justice controversial is “how” this outcome is **created**, “how” those rights are **recognized** and **protected**, and “how” **decisions** render that fair and honest.

There are a number of assumptions derived from this definition which contribute to this controversy. If the objective is to create a fair and equal society, then who is in charge of creating that? If the goal is a fair society determined in honest ways, what process ensures no bias, dishonesty, or injustice? If the purpose is recognized and protected rights, then what are these and by what mechanisms can they be guaranteed? This definition of social justice considers inequality to be unjust. That would especially apply to the economic and social welfare of society. The remedy for a fair and equal social paradigm is guaranteeing equality of outcome for all. The objective of social justice is to construct that society.

Pope Leo XIII Encyclical

Fairness and equality have not always been understood as essential for a just society. Near the turn of the twentieth century, Pope Leo XIII wrote an encyclical (a letter to the whole world) entitled “Rerum Novarum,” the new things, the new times. The encyclical was about economic and social matters related to the rise of the industrial revolution. The point of the encyclical was to confront a socialist attempt to create a just society based on fairness and equity.

The pope viewed socialism as the major threat to a just society “to remedy these wrongs the socialists, working on the poor man’s envy of the rich, are striving to do away with private property, and contend that individual possessions should become the common property of all, to be administered by the State or by municipal bodies.” He noted “Socialists, therefore, by endeavoring to transfer the possessions of individuals to the community at large, strike at the interests of every wage-earner, since they would deprive him of the liberty of disposing of his wages, and thereby of all hope and possibility of increasing his resources and of bettering his condition in life.” [https://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo_13/113rerum.htm]

The encyclical argued against socialist attempts to redistribute private property “the practice of all ages has consecrated the principle of private ownership, as being pre-eminently in conformity with human nature, and as conducing in the most unmistakable manner to the peace and tranquility of human existence.” The Pope stated “the contention, then, that the civil government should at its option intrude into and exercise intimate control over the family and the household is a great and pernicious error.”

The Pope's encyclical established social inequality as just "it must be first of all recognized that the condition of things inherent in human affairs must be borne with, for it is impossible to reduce civil society to one dead level... There naturally exist among mankind manifold differences of the most important kind; people differ in capacity, skill, health, strength; and unequal fortune is a necessary result of unequal condition. **Such inequality is far from being disadvantageous either to individuals or to the community**" [highlight mine].

The fact that we are unequal is a benefit for society. Thus Leo XIII did not mean by "social justice" equality. On the contrary, the encyclical declared that an unequal society is a good thing. Equality is against nature and against the entire range of human gifts and ingenuity. It is our human abilities, and talents that make us necessarily unequal in outcomes.

Progressive Takeover

So, what changed? Since the writing of the pope's encyclical, there has been a gradual and more recent accelerated progressive takeover of the mission of social justice. Progressives today have radicalized this concept to create and establish a just society based on equality through redistribution. This is the very idea the encyclical confronted a hundred or so years earlier. William H. Young (Author: "Centering America: Resurrecting the Local Progressive Ideal") defines this contemporary nature of social justice, "social justice has evolved generally to mean state redistribution of advantages and resources to disadvantaged groups to satisfy their rights to social and economic equality." [Dr. Voddie Baucham message, <https://statementonsocialjustice.com/videos/defining-social-justice/>]

When we compare Young's definition of social justice with the "Oxford Dictionary," we can see the evolution of progressive social justice ideology.

- The "Oxford Dictionary" says the objective of social justice is creating a fair and equal society. The progressive answer is that a governing authority be endowed with the power to impose that fair and equal society.
- The "Oxford Dictionary" says a fair and equal society is made in ways that are fair and honest. Progressive thinking says that fair and honest process requires redistribution of advantages and resources.
- The "Oxford Dictionary" says each individual matters. The progressive mission enforces redistribution of advantages and resources to disadvantaged groups, not individuals.
- The "Oxford Dictionary" says rights must be recognized and protected. Progressives demand that disadvantaged groups have a right to social and economic equality.

Ultimately, the contemporary social justice vision requires a socialist means of control over society to ensure redistributive justice which is defined as "the equalization of property and wealth ownership by direct political fiat." [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redistributive_justice] Social justice is an artificial paradigm created for political purposes. A further evaluation of this social justice ideology reveals its extreme social and political aspirations.

Social Justice Mission

The mission of social justice **identifies** disadvantaged groups, not individuals, as the target for social and economic equality. Individuals may or may not have success, but that does not negate the issues inherent to the group as a whole. It is disadvantaged groups, not necessarily minorities, that create this priority. Women make up a greater voting block in America than men, but they

are considered one of the disadvantaged groups included in the social justice agenda. As a result of this group privilege, politics has transformed into identity politics “a political approach and analysis based on people prioritizing the concerns most relevant to their particular racial, religious, ethnic, sexual, cultural or other [group] identity.” [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identity_politics] The disadvantaged group shares a history of injustice and grievance to be exploited for advantage.

The mission of social justice **resolves** the disadvantaged groups particular grievance through a redistribution of power and resources in order to redress the injustice the group has experienced. It does not matter if a group is disadvantaged because of something inherent within that group, such as a lack of education or family breakdown. That type of accusation would be disparaged as victim-blaming. The answer is a redress of grievances of that particular group. Inequality is injustice for a disadvantaged group.

The mission of social justice **ensures** resource equity. This entails a redistribution of resources from those who have apparently unjustly gained them to those who justly deserve them. It is only a decisive redistribution of resources along with the decision-making power that can ensure social justice. It is this extreme process that guarantees equal opportunity, equal access, and equal outcome. It does not matter how an individual may have arrived at his or her social and economic advantage. The determination of that advantage as just or unjust has nothing to do with how one acquired it, but everything to do with which group one belongs to.

Dr. Voddie Baucham illustrates this disparity of outcome within social justice groupings.

You can be a white person from Appalachia who was born with nothing and clawed yourself out. It doesn't matter. You are the privileged one. And if you stand shoulder to shoulder with the son or daughter of Colin Powell who grew up with privilege and power, the answer is whatever they have they deserve. And whatever you have, you did not. [This is so] because social justice looks at [the disparity of] the group [not individual]. [Dr. Voddie Baucham message, <https://statementonsocialjustice.com/videos/defining-social-justice/>]

It seems clear, then, that social justice today is distributive justice where disadvantaged groups are identified, their grievances acknowledged, and a governing authority is enforcing redistribution from advantaged groups to disadvantaged ones to secure resource equity. This leaves us with the question, “Is this social justice mission a biblical responsibility?”

Social Justice Run Amok

An online social justice group called “Faithful America” agrees that today’s social justice mission is a biblical responsibility. They call themselves the largest online community of Christians putting faith into action for social justice. Faithful America claims to be “organizing the faithful to... renew the church’s prophetic role in building a more free and just society.” On their webpage, they list some of their social justice successes. The first to be listed—they fought back against Hobby Lobby’s religious objection to providing insurance coverage for contraception. With thousands of petition signatures, they were able to demonstrate Christian opposition to the “religious freedom” attack on birth control—a perceived threat to one of their disadvantaged groups, women, and their right to choose.

The second social justice success on their list was convincing Google to drop World Vision. World Vision had announced plans to stop discriminating against gays and lesbians, but reversed those plans due to the “furious outcry of the religious right.” More than 17,000 Faithful America members called on Google to find new Christian partners that do not discriminate. In solidarity, a Google executive who had been serving on World Vision’s board resigned. Their activism was due to a perceived threat to one of their other disadvantaged groups, gay and lesbian.

The remainder of the list includes forcing MSNBC to drop the Family Research Council due to its perceived threat against bisexuals and transgender people, another grievance group of the social justice warriors. They also defended a pastor who they claim was unjustly defrocked by the Pennsylvania United Methodist Church for officiating at the wedding of his gay son. The fact that he was fired was unjust. According to Faithful America, the largest online community of Christians, it is a sin **not** to perform same-sex unions. This injustice equals sin. The list concludes with fighting the fracking industry along with the anti-fracking nuns, the Sisters of Loretto, to stop the bluegrass Pipeline. Environmentalism is another favorite hobby horse of social justice activism. [<https://act.faithfulamerica.org/signup/about-us/>]

The social justice movement has prioritized at least three arenas of concern—minority group equality, feminism and women’s rights, and LGBTQA+. Faithful America has taken this social justice agenda and embedded it within the Christian mission. However, this social justice mission is not a biblical one. There is no biblical basis for providing insurance for contraception, officiating same sex marriages, advocating for bisexual and transgenderism, or environmental activism against fracking. Absent from their list are biblical things like sharing the gospel, or pursuing discipleship, eternal rewards, spiritual maturity, and self-denial. **Actually, Christ followers who understand the social justice mission ought to be ashamed to ever advocate for or equate social justice with our biblical responsibility.**

The Bible and Justice

Instead of participating in today’s social justice mission, Christians should desire and pursue moral and righteous justice. Peter tells us we are promised that someday *but according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which **righteousness** dwells* (2 Peter 3:13). God’s righteous justice will finally and forever be on full display. That is something we are hopeful of and long for as we manage life in such an unjust world. The social justice mission has no interest in God’s righteous justice.

Doing justice, biblical justice, together with loving mercy and walking humbly with God, were essential virtues for Israel *with what shall I come to the Lord and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* (Micah 6-6-8). The social justice mission has no interest in biblical justice that loves mercy and walks humbly with God.

The Mosaic Law revealed God’s loathing of injustice *you shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in **righteousness shall you judge your***

neighbor (Leviticus 19:15). Even in the most basic issues God detested injustice *differing weights are an abomination to the Lord, and a false scale is not good* (Proverbs 20:23). God indicts judges in Israel who perverted justice in society, *give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them out of the hand of the wicked* (Psalm 82:3-4). God demanded that His leaders defend and vindicate the rights of all oppressed and afflicted people in Israelite society. The social justice mission is only interested in grievances of their own disadvantaged groups. So it does not render justice to everyone.

Jesus illustrated a path by which we can respond to injustice. After hearing that his cousin, *John had been taken into custody*, Jesus *withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali* (Matthew 4:12-13). What's with that? Jesus didn't start a #freemycousinjohn campaign? He didn't launch an aggressive grievance crusade against Herod and his henchmen? No. Jesus withdrew into *the region of Zebulun and Naphtali*, which fulfilled prophecy (Matthew 4:14; Isaiah 9:1). His only message to the people there was *repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Matthew 4:17). That, for sure, is not a social justice priority.

Later, Jesus was *walking by the sea of Galilee* (Matthew 4:18) and invited some fishermen to join him. Then other men came in a boat, and *He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."* *Immediately they left their nets and followed Him* (Matthew 4:19-20). There was no social justice mission to resolve the Old Testament prophet's disadvantaged situation. Instead, they *went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues* (the Word of God) *and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom* (evangelism and discipleship), *and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people* (doing all the good they could for everyone they could, whether it had anything to do with the Gospel or not) (Matthew 4:23). It is clear that Jesus did not imbed a social justice mission into His ministry.

The kingdom of God has eternal priorities that supersede a social justice mission. Jesus Christ's ministry exemplified the eternal over the social. It is important to understand that God never does anything contrary to His plan. That includes injustice. We can have confidence in that plan, just as Jesus did when confronted with the injustice of John's arrest and imprisonment. Injustice is not an excuse to ignore those eternal realities in order to pursue social justice advocacy. Injustice can serve in its own way as a motivation to endure and persevere in those eternal priorities of the kingdom of God.

The early church advocated for charitable service especially for the disadvantaged in the church. *Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food* (Acts 6:1). Here was a legitimate grievance that required a solution. It was resolved without compromising spiritual priorities for social ones. *So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task"* (Acts 6:2-3). They did not advocate for a march to the Sanhedrin. The apostles didn't initiate a

#widowsindistress campaign on the apostle's Facebook. The church simply addressed righteous justice issues as part of a believer's biblical responsibility to one another.

The Bible and Equality

The social justice movement considers inequality unjust, but the Bible does not. The Bible documents inequality as a virtuous concept. God showed His favoritism of Israel when in her infancy God *passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you while you were in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you while you were in your blood, 'Live!'* (Ezekiel 16:6). When Israel left Egypt, the Lord informed Israel that they were His chosen people as *a special possession above all the peoples who are on the face of the ground* (Deuteronomy 7:6). Indeed, *the whole earth and everything in it is the Lord's* (Deuteronomy 10:14), but Israel is His special possession.

Israel's unique status was directly connected to the covenant, *"and now, if you will certainly obey my voice and keep my covenant; then you will be my special possession above all the peoples, for all the earth is mine"* (Exodus 19:5). As God's special possession Israel was a physical representation of the Lord on the earth *I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations* (Isaiah 42:6). So, in choosing the nation of Israel over other nations, God had made a distinction. He was discriminating between nations, not treating them as equals.

Jesus' parable of the talents teaches that some will have more dominion, authority, power and wealth in God's kingdom. Servants were given personal property to invest by the master *each according to his own ability* (Matthew 25:15). Eventually their investment was accounted for when the master returned. Two invested well and were *put [you] in charge of many things* (v. 25). Another invested nothing and was called *a wicked, lazy servant* (v. 26). A social justice warrior might have expected a redistribution of wealth when the Master returned. Instead, the unprofitable servant's talent was given to the one who had ten (v. 28).

Jesus' final statement seems unjust. *For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance. But to the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken from him* (v. 29). However, in God's economy, that is just the way it is. Inequality is the natural outcome of personal responsibility, or according to Pope Leo XIII "there naturally exist among mankind manifold differences of the most important kind; people differ in capacity, skill, health, strength; and unequal fortune is a necessary result of unequal condition." Each of the servants had equal opportunity and equal access. What they were not guaranteed was equal outcome. That depended upon how they each invested.

Even the Messianic kingdom of God will contain national and individual inequities in the distribution of dominion, authority, power, and wealth. Therefore, Christ's earthly kingdom will not be socially just. The regathering of Israel before the Messianic kingdom reveals preferential treatment for Israel and service from "strangers," *when the Lord will have compassion on Jacob and again choose Israel, and settle them in their own land, then strangers will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob* (Isaiah 14:1).

Instead of a redistribution of wealth, as the peoples escort the children of Israel back to their land, they will bring with them the wealth of the nations with which Zion is beautified. *Then you will see and be radiant, and your heart will thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, the wealth of the nations will come to you* (Isaiah 60:5). Equality in the Messianic kingdom will not resemble the vision of the current social justice movement. Inequality seems to be a natural and expected aspect of the sovereign rule of God in Christ's earthly kingdom.

There also seems to be inequality in heaven. Praise and honor at the Judgment Seat of Christ reveals the eternal significance of rewards *each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward* (1 Corinthians 3:15-16). The specific terminology employed in Matthew 6:19-21, *treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys*; in 1 Corinthians 9:25, *imperishable, incorruptible, immortal*; and in 1 Peter 5:4, *unfading*, describe future rewards and promised crowns, and is strong testimony to their eternal nature. There will be eternal distinctions.

The Bible and Individuals

While the social justice mission prioritizes disadvantaged groups, the Bible elevates the individual to a special status. The chronicler declared, *for the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His* (2 Chronicles 16:9). God *had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard* (Genesis 4:4). *The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, but it was Noah [who] found favor in the eyes of the Lord* (Genesis 6:8). Abraham left his homeland and family at the command of God and *the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land"* (Genesis 12:7). From the beginning, the entire plan of God was based upon a string of individuals who were elevated to special roles in the outworking of God's plan.

This plan expanded through a myriad of persons receiving God's attention. While Hagar was desperate in the wilderness *God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar?"* (Genesis 21:17). God was attentive to the elevation of Joseph; calling Moses; equipping Gideon; honoring Hannah; commissioning Samuel; vindicating Samson; anointing David; protecting Rahab; supporting Ruth; intervening for Daniel; and encouraging Nehemiah.

Jesus had many encounters with individuals throughout His ministry. He chose His disciples individually, *He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me"* (Mark 1:16). Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John record more than forty encounters between Jesus and various individuals. In nine cases, Jesus initiated the conversations like that of the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-42) and a crippled beggar (John 5:1-15).

In twenty-five instances, another party began the conversation, along with Jesus' response including the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-30), a demoniac (Mark 5:1-20), Jairus, a synagogue ruler (Mark 5:21-43), and a hemorrhaging woman (Mark 5:24-34). Other

conversations were triggered by third parties, such as the tax collectors and other sinners invited to a party by Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13), Nathaniel, invited by Philip (John 1:45-51), and an adulterous woman brought by the scribes to Jesus (John 8:1-11). Many conversations happened in the workplace as with James and John (Matthew 4:21-22). Several others took place in homes, as at Zacchaeus' house (Luke 19:1-10). [<https://bible.org/illustration/how-jesus-interacted-people>]

Jesus example contrasts with the social justice mission of serving disadvantaged groups. Jesus took the initiative with persons. He responded to individuals. He left room in His schedule for interruptions by friends, neighbors, and strangers enlisting His assistance. Jesus usually met people on their own turf. He was interested in establishing common ground to facilitate further conversation and pursue understanding. A social justice mission has no time or interest in prioritizing these types of individual focus. Yet, this is what a biblical ministry looks like. This is the substance of a biblical mission.

The church also embodies this personal aspect of God's attention. The church is not called a community where the group is placed over the individual. The church is called God's household *I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth* (1 Timothy 3:15). In a household, everybody, each individual, has a place at the table. The church is a collection of persons, networked together *no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints*, where each individual believer is a member *of God's household* (Ephesians 2:19). Not a group to be exploited.

The church, like a *body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ* (1 Corinthians 12:12). The church is a group of persons each with a place and role in serving the interests of the entire body. The point of these illustrations is the preservation of individuals, who collectively make up the church. The church is not a collective where individuals are sacrificed for the mission of the group.

God never loses site of each individual person, whether in the establishing of the nation of Israel, or His outworking of those national purposes. That same individual spotlight is true of Jesus' own life and ministry. God's attention to individuals follows in the service and ministry of Christ's church. This is not so with the social justice mission of group identity. In that case, the individual is expendable.

Conclusion

Adapting the term "social justice" to describe our biblical responsibility is not appropriate. That term is understood by everyone else in a non-biblical manner. To use the term, we have to redefine it in ways not used in the "Oxford Dictionary," schools and universities, social institutions, and government agencies. It is toxic terminology associated with groups that have a radical view of social evolution, which support sinful means to bring about justice. It is not proper to use "social justice" parlance as a description of the work of God in the world.

The message of social justice diverts attention from Christ and the cross. It turns our hearts and minds from things above to things on this earth. It obscures the promise of forgiveness for hopeless sinners by telling them they are hapless victims of other's misdeeds. The Apostle Paul did not attempt to change the structure of Roman slavery, certainly a social justice issue, though

he did address its function in Philemon. Paul said that among Christians, both the slave-owners served the best interests of the slave, and the slave served the best interest of the slave-owners. And both were acting to bring glory to Christ.

As believers, our mission is clearly different. That mission is to make disciples and train people to live for the glory of God, as outlined in the Great Commission. *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations* (Matthew 28:19-20). While believers in both Testaments are to do good to all people, it is the household of believers to which these efforts are consistently directed (one another passages). The teaching of the New Testament is that the church is to have a laser-like focus on the mission the Lord has given us – to make disciples.

Christ-followers, who understand the social justice mission, ought to be ashamed to ever advocate for or equate social justice with our biblical responsibility.