

A Biblical Basis for Social Justice

This is an abbreviated version of a paper originally prepared by
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***There is neither Jew nor Greek,
slave nor free, male nor female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
Galatians 3:28***

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NOTE: This is an abbreviated version of a much larger work originally undertaken by a task force appointed by the Board of Governors of SIM to investigate issues of social injustice in the context of Christian mission. The paper produced is not a final statement on justice or an SIM position paper, and does not reflect the beliefs and opinions held by all SIM members. The convictions presented represent the interplay between the various authors' biblical understanding, cultural worldview, and personal perspectives. This has been a very helpful process for SIM to work through.
Malcolm McGregor, SIM International Director

A Biblical Basis for Social Justice

God is Just

The starting point for discussing and writing about social justice is God, acknowledging that he is, in his very essence, Just (Deuteronomy 10:17-18, Psalm 89:14, Jeremiah 9:23-24). God's justice pervades all areas of life in the universe. Shalom encompasses just and harmonious relationships between God and people, between people (social), and between people and the rest of the world (nature or the environment).

People are made in the image of God, whose character is just. The attempted distortion of God's image by Satan, apparent in the sinful values and actions of humanity when they oppress others, is the cause of injustice. This does not change through time; the same injustices listed by Amos (chapters 1, 2, and 6) are in the world today.

As the authors of this research looked at the range of injustices that commonly fall under the realm of social justice, the pivotal importance of Galatians 3:28 was realized. Virtually all social injustices or abuses of power happen between people groups, or between rich and poor people, or between men and women (and children are often the amplified victims of all three of these injustices). Galatians 3:26–28 says, 'You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'. This is God's standard for social relationships. As the church pursues living by this verse, what a testimony we can have in the world today: racism, poverty and gender injustices could be radically highlighted and countered.

This paper is therefore laid out as follows:

- ◆ Chapter 1 presents a short synopsis of God's just character and a biblical basis for Christian concern for issues of social justice.
- ◆ Chapter 2 describes evil, sin and the forces of darkness, and the battle against God who is Just.
- ◆ Chapter 3 discusses the kingdom of God and the role of Christians to reflect the values of the King of Kings in the world today.
- ◆ Chapter 4 considers racism.
- ◆ Chapter 5 considers economic disparities.
- ◆ Chapter 6 considers gender inequality.
- ◆ Chapter 7 considers the implications of racial, socio-economic, and gender inequality on children.

This is only preliminary research. Further research might include:

- The different views that Individualistic and Collective societies produce.
- More detailed appreciation of the term 'social' in its categories of family, community, institutional, national and global levels
- How Old Testament expectations for Israel apply to Christians today
- Restorative and redistributive justice
- Spiritual poverty

Significance

This paper seeks to encourage God's people to become more Christ-like, treating all people equally in love, regardless of race, economic status, age or gender. Some general recommendations are offered in chapters 4 – 7. The full conclusion of the matter is described in Revelation, in the new heaven and earth, with people from every nation, tribe, and language worshipping God. Until then, the authors encourage God's people to worship Him here, growing evermore like Christ, testifying of Him and His kingdom in the world now (Philemon 6).

God's Just Character and a Biblical Framework for Justice in the World Today

Old Testament

The Scriptural basis for justice among people begins in creation. Men and women were created in God's likeness; equal in value, dignity, and position, with equal lordship and responsibility to subdue and steward the earth and its resources (Genesis 1:28 – 5:2). People are to guard and care for one another and for the earth. The Fall broke the relationships among the beautiful community of people, between people and God, as well as the relationships between people and creation (Genesis 3). Yet God continued to protect people, all of whom continue to bear his image (Genesis 3:22ff).

God put a national, tribal and family priesthood in place which he maintained in order to witness and to teach the sanctity of life to the nations (Exodus 19:5-6, Malachi 2:4-7 and Ezekiel 44:23 and 24). In the Old Testament covenant's stipulations and related topics, God reminds people to deal justly with one another, and to neither prefer nor oppress anyone. A nation's justice system must ensure that all people always receive equal and fair adjudication. Corruption of any kind is strongly condemned. God, as King and Judge, does not tolerate the abuse of power. He consecrates freedom. The themes of truth and justice are repeated many times in the Pentateuch, the Psalms and the Prophets (including in Genesis 18:19, 25; Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 19:15, 35-36; Numbers 15:15, 16, 29 – 31; Deuteronomy 1:17; 4:8; 16:20; 33:10; Psalms 33:5; 72:1-4; 97:2; Proverbs 2:9; 8:5; 11:19a; 12:21, 28; Isaiah 1:17; 26 – 27; 5:7; 9:7; 32:1-16; 33:5, 14-15; Jeremiah 4:2; 9:23-24; 21:12; 22:1-5; 33:15; Amos 5:15, 24).

The Ten Commandments are key in God's kingdom, and set the moral basis of justice (Exodus 20:1-17). Caring for the poor, sick, and oppressed is repeatedly stressed by God as an expectation of His people (Exodus 23:11; Leviticus 19:10; 23:22; 25:35; Deuteronomy 15:11; 24:12, 24:15; Esther 9:22; Psalms 82:3; 109:16; Proverbs 14:31; 19:17; 21:13; 28:27; 29:7; 31:9-10; Isaiah 10:2; 25:4; 58:7; 61:1; Jeremiah 5:28; 22:16; Ezekiel 16:49; 22:29; 34:4; Amos 2:7; 4:1; 5:12; Zechariah 7:10).

There is evidence of God's priority on justice numerous times in the Old Testament. For example: In Exodus 16 and Deuteronomy 15, *manna* (material provision) is proclaimed by God as the basis of equity. In the Old Testament, material provision is the primary, but not exclusive, context of God's justice. While poverty is not tolerated in God's kingdom, it remains a huge challenge in the world's kingdoms that wait to be transformed by God's kingdom ethics and duties. Leviticus 25 and 26 particularly address the accumulation of land, human redress and God's redress when people ignore their just responsibilities (Genesis 6:5-6, 11-12, 7-9:6; 18:20-21; 19:1-25; Ezekiel 16:49 also speak to this).

The provision of Jubilee and its celebration indicates that the redemption of full justice, or Shalom, is the goal of God's kingdom on earth (Numbers 6:22-26; Judges 6:24; Isaiah 11; 65:17-25; Romans 13:8-10; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; 3 John 1-2).

The prophets see the Messianic age as the age when God establishes justice and reigns (Isaiah 32:1; 16; 33:5, 14-15; 65:17-24; Malachi 2:4).

Isaiah 42:1-7 shows that God seeks His justice for all nations, for the whole earth (not only for Christ's believers). This passage also shows that His justice includes healing and freedom.

Isaiah 65:17-24 shows the results of justice in the world, and by comparison indicates areas where humanity continues to fall short of justice: infants and young people dying, homes and food taken by others, fruitless labour, and children doomed to misfortune, insecurity and fear.

Jeremiah 9:23-24, and John 17:3 proclaim that knowing God means to understand His character and nature as being, doing and relating, all intertwined mercy, justice and righteousness.

Amos 5:24, 'let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream', is a key kingdom value for us to pursue as we pray for 'His kingdom to come, His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10). We are instruments God desires to use to influence his reign on earth.

The intensity of the meaning of justice grows steadily in the Old Testament until it is ultimately equated with *shalom*: total wholeness and harmony. To God be the glory!

New Testament

In Luke 11:42 Jesus shows the importance God places on justice when he says, 'Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.' This statement shows that God expects his people to pursue justice on earth.

God reconciles the Universe to Himself through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This re-emphasizes His commitment to justice as it was before the Fall, although the fulfillment will not be complete until Christ returns to rule on earth, John 16:21-22; 33; Hebrews 1:8-9; 2:8; Revelation 21 & 22.

The restoration of God's justice in society is sometimes described as the new order of social relationships where 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female' (Galatians 3:28); a society in which there are no longer racial, socio-economic or gender disparities.

All people who are adopted by God to become His children (John 1:12), and are both equal and equally responsible for managing, or caring for the world. Socially, this is to be manifested in several ways:

- in reconciled relationships (Matthew 5:23-24)
- in everyone caring for their families (1 Timothy 5:4 & 8)
- in caring for all human beings (Luke 10:25-37)
- in caring for all Christians, so that none are in need (Acts 2:43-45, 11:29-30, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4)
- in giving quietly to one another, so that the recipient's equal human dignity is maintained (Matthew 6:2-4)
- in caring for God's creation, which hopes to be delivered from its state of corruption and decadence into the glorious freedom of the children of God, as it will manifest in the fulfillment of the justice of God (Romans 8:4; 18-21)

The New Testament lists people specifically in need of care: widows and orphans (1 Timothy 5:3-7, James 1:27), the hungry, the thirsty, strangers, the sick, prisoners (Matthew 25), beggars, (Luke 16:19 & 20), and outcasts (John 4); these are more often collectively termed the 'poor' (Matthew 19:21; 26:11;

Luke 12:33; 18:22; 19:8; John 12:8; Acts 9:36; 10:5; 24:17; Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 13:3; 2 Corinthians 9:9; Galatians 2:10). Caring for the poor is an imperative to God.

These hallmarks of God's children on earth are not new in the New Testament - they all reflect God's character and his desire for his people mentioned throughout the Old Testament. For example, in Leviticus 19:15, God stressed that there was to be no favoritism. In the New Testament God expresses the same truth in James 2:1-12. Following Christ's resurrection, judgments are to be administered with mercy (James 2:13). Justice, mercy and faithfulness are to be taught and practiced by God's people, especially by their leaders (Matthew 23 & Matthew 19); there should be no boasting and oppression. This reflects Jeremiah 9:23, 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight.'

Again, as in Isaiah 32, the Servant Songs, and Romans 14:17, the hallmarks of the Messianic Kingdom on earth are to be Kingdom people who care about righteousness, peace and joy.

Paul encouraged generous giving and sharing among the believers (2 Corinthians 8 & 9). Paul, here, echoes Exodus 16 when God provided manna, as the illustration for equity in the kingdom of God where everyone gives according to his/her best capacities to every one according to his/her felt necessity.

In James 2:18-19, God tells us that if the manifestations of His likeness on earth are not seen in a particular Christian, then some may question whether the person is a follower of Christ.

God's character, the hallmark of His children, is to be demonstrated in all social relationships: in families, communities, with institutions, and even to an occupying government (Romans 13:1-10). God's Just character is to be seen in all His children's relationships with everyone throughout the world. Pursuing this and seeing it prompts worship of the God of the Universe.

Sadly, Satan, the Prince of this world has other schemes (John 12:31). Chapter 2 explores the manifestation of good and evil and Satan's efforts to work against God's kingdom values set out in Galatians 3:28.

The Manifestation of Good and Evil

A biblical foundation of justice is incomplete without addressing the origin of injustice: evil, sin, the forces of darkness, and the use and abuse of power.

Evil, Sin, and the Forces of Darkness

The question of evil and how to most effectively combat it is not new. But as social justice, or injustice, is discussed it is important to have a biblical understanding of evil and its relationship to injustice. Evil, sin, and the forces of darkness are complex and at work within multiple aspects of life: individual, social-collective, and institutional-structural dimensions, as well as in the unseen world. Yet the goodness, grace, mercy and justice of God also pervade these dimensions. At the core of the gospel is God's kingdom appearing, and God reconciling to himself creation and human beings from every nation, tribe, people and language.

God's Eternal Purposes

In the beginning was God: eternal, good, loving, sovereign, perfect and just. The whole world was created by God and belongs to him (Genesis 1; Psalm 33:5-11; Job 1:6-12). Evil was present in the universe before Eve and Adam ate the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:1). "Humanity is the climax of God's earthly creation, bearing his image, designed for relationship with him, and being the object of his redeeming love".¹ God created human beings with the assurance of his provision and with the mandate to have dominion over creation (Genesis 1:28). However with Adam and Eve choosing to reject God's authority, sin and evil entered our world destroying the fullness of life, relationships and community. "This results in guilt, death and alienation from God as well as the defacing of every aspect of human nature".² Away from God we are insecure, spiritually lost, and without hope. All human beings, with the exception of Jesus Christ, are sinners, such that we are equally under God's judgment and needing his mercy (Isaiah 53:6; Acts 2:38-40; Romans 3:23-24; 6:23; Hebrews 4:15-16). We share in the fallen state of God's present creation and the ongoing rebellion of humanity against God (Genesis 3:1-8; Matthew 24:4-14; Romans 1:18-2:1; 5:12; 2 Timothy 3:1-5).³

Angels are "personal spirit beings who glorify God, serve him, and minister to his people".⁴ Created as God's messengers they possess free will and knowledge (Mark 13:32). Like human beings, some have used this to rebel against God (2 Peter 2:4). Satan is a fallen angel and the enemy of God and humanity. We see him manifested as the face of biblical evil, actively at work in multiple dimensions: in and through individuals, within communities, behind social and institutional structures, as well as in the unseen world. Satan's power is usurped, not absolute; he is the father of lies and deception, a roaring lion seeking to devour, who encourages sinful humanity in our ongoing rebellion (Genesis 3:4-5; John 8:42-45; 1 Peter 5:8-9).⁵

However, the forces of darkness, including demons and evil spirits, are ultimately subordinate to God. They together with Satan are defeated enemies, conquered by Christ, subject to God's authority, and

¹ SIM Statement of Faith

² Ibid.

³ Phillip Marshall. "Towards a Theology of HIV&AIDS" in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 29/2, (Apr 2005). pp. 136-37.

⁴ SIM Statement of Faith

⁵ Hiebert. *ibid.*

facing eternal condemnation (Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22).⁶ Jesus came to destroy the work of the devil, evil and sin through his death and resurrection (1 John 3:8; Matthew 6:13, Ephesians 1:18-21). Yet human beings remain vulnerable to sin's influence and the work of the evil one in this world. They are unable to save themselves from Satan's dominion and from sin's penalty and power.⁷

All human beings continue to be implicated in a spiritual/cosmic battle led by Satan and his forces against God (Job 1:7-11; Luke 22:31-32; Luke 10:17-20; Revelation 13:5-8). God's people work with him to establish his kingdom on earth (Matthew 6:9-10; 6:33; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9) but a multi-dimensional backlash from Satan and the forces of darkness is seldom far behind. This battle is not determined or won by human power. The spiritual forces of evil are to be resisted and fought using spiritual weapons (2 Corinthians 10:3-6; Ephesians 6:10-18, 1 Peter 5:9-10; James 4:7; Revelation 12:11). "As we confront demonic powers in our Christian pilgrimage, we should face them as victors, for Christ has won the victory over them through his blood".⁸

God hates evil and as judge will punish all who are disobedient to his revealed glory and commandments and who bring dishonour to his name (Acts 17:31; Romans 1:18; Hebrews 10:26-27; 1 Peter 4:17). In the words of the Manila Manifesto, "The whole Gospel is the good news of God's salvation from the power of evil, the establishment of his eternal kingdom and his final victory over everything which defies his purpose".⁹ Salvation involves the deliverance from, and destruction of, evil, sin and injustice and all spiritual forces committed to these.

Christ the King will one day come again to bring in his kingdom in its fullness (Isaiah 65:17-25; Matthew 24:30-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; Revelation 21:1-5). "The kingdom is in its present beginnings though future in its fullness: in one sense it is here already, but in the richest sense it is still to come (Luke 11:20; 16:16; 22:16, 18, 29-30)".¹⁰ He will come as judge over sinners, Satan, evil, the forces of darkness, and death itself, demonstrating his justice, righteousness, and the rightness of God's ways (Romans 2:5-16; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Hebrews 9:28). Until that time the whole earth groans and waits (Romans 8:19-21). God has given to humanity a social mandate to populate the earth, to live by the values of the kingdom, to care as stewards for the earth and all it contains, and to actively oppose manifestations of evil (Genesis 1:28; 2:15; 4:9-10; Psalm 50:10-12; Matthew 6:26-30)¹¹.

Because humanity includes those who do not yet recognise Christ as Lord over all, he has given an evangelistic mandate to make disciples of all peoples (Philippians 2:9-11; Genesis 12:2-3; 1 Kings 8:41-43; Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). This mandate is carried out by verbal proclamation, by deeds of righteousness and justice, and by a lifestyle of holiness (Matthew 6:33, Colossians 4:5-6; Ephesians 5:11-17; 1 Timothy 3:7; Titus 2:12-14).

Manifestations of Evil, Sin, the Forces of Darkness, and Injustice in our World

The sinful corruption arising out of the first act of rebellion in Eden has affected every conceivable aspect of creation. Paul Hiebert's¹² helpful model of worldview alerts us to dualistic philosophy

⁶ Nkansah-Obrempong. "Angels, Demons and Powers," in *Africa Bible Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2006. pp. 1,454

⁷ SIM Statement of Faith, 7 November 2006

⁸ Nkansah-Obrempong. *ibid*

⁹ Lausanne Committee. *Manila Manifesto*. www.lausanne.org/manila-1989/manila-manifesto.html

¹⁰ J.I.Packer. *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*. (Carol Stream: Tyndale House,1993) p. 194

¹¹ Hiebert. *ibid*.

¹² Paul Hiebert. *Cultural Anthropology 2nd edn* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) pp. 365ff; Paul Hiebert, *Transforming World views: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) pp. 141ff

embraced by Western thought. The latter assumes that reality is divided into the invisible/supernatural and the visible/material, and excludes a middle ground where evil forces manifest themselves daily. This thinking heavily influences how evil is conceptualized. Although Christians have rightly emphasized God at work in the individual, the reality of God and Satan operating in the collective-social and structural-institutional dimensions has often been ignored or misunderstood by Westerners. These dimensions are often addressed in non-Western theologies which have integrated worldviews. The whole Gospel is indeed good news of God's salvation from the power of evil, sin and the forces of darkness, both seen and unseen across all dimensions of our world, and the establishment of His eternal kingdom.

Multi-dimensional manifestations of evil and good: a framework

Suffering and disease, violence and conflict, pain and death all have their roots in human sin, the pervasive presence of evil, and ultimately in broken relationships between God and humanity, humanity with each other, and humanity with creation. Sin and the injustices it fosters are essentially relational.¹³

Within the *individual dimension*, both God and evil are active in the core of worldview expressed through beliefs, attitudes, values and behavior. Every individual experiences temptation and sin, (Matthew 1:18-25; 16:21-24, Luke 12:13-21, 16:19-31). Within the *social-collective dimension*, good and evil are expressed through gender, family, community and ethnic relations, (Genesis 50:19-20; Matthew 12:34-35, 18:1-4; 23:32-33; Luke 10:25-37; John 8:1-11; Galatians 3:28). Good and evil in the *structural-institutional* dimension impact economics, governance and the environment. Sin is evident in greed, corruption and abuse of resources, (2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 82; Mark 11:15-18; Romans 13:1-7; Revelation 18:21-24). Spiritual warfare occurs in the *spiritual-cosmic dimension*. Prayer and the armor of God are essential for spiritual battle. Evil, sin, the forces of darkness are apparent and emphasized differently across cultures and worldviews, but often we can be blind to their manifestation in our own culture.

These four dimensions are porous with elements of each interacting with others. This can readily be seen, for example, in the global HIV&AIDS epidemic, where evil, sin, and injustice, as well as goodness and justice, are manifest across the individual, social-collective, structural-institutional and spiritual-cosmic dimensions. An integrated, multi-dimensional response to this pandemic, at all levels, including the transformation of worldviews, and spiritual warfare at the spiritual cosmic level can produce the most effective response.

The Use and Misuse of Power

Human beings take power into their own hands and assert power over others for self-serving and self-protecting ends. This is evident in abusive relationships in every dimension. God expects those in power to care for the powerless and vulnerable, (1 Samuel 8:3; Psalm 82; Proverbs 25:15, 31:8, 9). In the coming of Jesus the Messiah, the sinful use of power is broken through the cross. The true path of strength lies in humility and servant-hood through Christ's power, (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). The resurrection of Jesus brings hope of righteous judgment on the wicked, and hope of a new and just heaven and earth without disorder and injustice, (John 5:28-29; Revelation 21:2-4)¹⁴.

Consideration should be given to our own misuses of power, and to the role of advocacy to influence the policies and practices of the powerful, (Proverbs 29:7; James 1:27; 2 Peter 1:3-9).

¹³ Christopher J.H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. (Leicester; Intervarsity Press, 2004) p. 259

¹⁴ Dewi Hughes. *Power and Poverty*. (Nottingham: Intervarsity Press, 2008)

Conclusion

God graciously invites us to work with him in each dimension of the endeavor to usher in justice. As diverse human beings, we need to join together to hear what God is saying and respond in his fullness. The pervasive manifestations of evil and injustice in our day require more than human solutions; instead God calls us to a dynamic partnership with him and with each other as gifted and complementing members of the body of Christ.

The Kingdom of God and the role of Christians today

Biblical Basis of the Kingdom

The teachings of Christ are full of references to the kingdom which became foundational to the early church, and therefore are essential to Christians today. To appreciate the New Testament teaching on the kingdom, we must go back to the beginning of the Biblical story. The immediate context of Genesis 1:26-27 tells us that God created humankind in his image in two ways. Firstly to be God's vice-regents over his earth, exercising stewardship for the betterment of the creation. Our creative impulses come from this aspect of God's image, but, twisted by the Fall, so does our desire to exploit the creation for our own power and pleasure. Secondly, we were created to love and be loved by others in mutually edifying relationships. Our impulses to enjoy relationships with others come from this aspect of God's image. Twisted by the Fall, so does our impulse to manipulate and use others for our own power and pleasure.

Instead of stewarding the earth to manifest God's righteous rule and cultivating mutually edifying relationships, human selfishness, pride and rebellion corrupted the earth and so perverted God's intended kingdom rule. God's call of Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3, launched his redemption of creation. God did not choose Abraham because he has given up on the nations. Rather Abraham 'is singled out precisely so that blessing may come to all the nations'¹ God's covenant with David, 2 Samuel 7, Isaiah 42:1-4; 61:1-4, further focused his redemptive plan through a son of David who would establish an eternal kingdom which would restore all that God intended for the earth.

The Old Testament prophets foresaw the coming of the Messiah. He would be empowered by God's Spirit, Isaiah 42:1-4; 61:1-4 and so would judge perfectly, punishing the wicked and providing justice for the poor and disempowered. He would bring peace, safety, prosperity, justice and righteousness to the world; all nations, even those who were then pagan nations, would follow him, Psalms 2; 18:43-45; 21:1-13; 45:2-7, 17; 110; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-14; 42:1-4; 56:3-8; Ezekiel 34:23-32; Zechariah 14:16. He would establish an eternal kingdom, crushing all previous earthly kingdoms, 2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 2:44-45, and would usher in a grand Year of Jubilee with rescue for the downtrodden of society, especially prisoners and the poor. Those who deserved punishment would be punished and those who mourned would be comforted, Isaiah 61:1-4.

One of the clearest messages of the gospels is that Jesus' mission was to announce and inaugurate this kingdom. Both John the Baptist, Matthew 3:2, and Jesus himself, Mark 1:15, announced that the kingdom of God was near. The gospels are equally clear that, in some sense, this kingdom arrived in the person of Jesus. In Luke 4:17-21 Jesus read from Isaiah 61 and then announced that 'today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'. He was announcing that the anticipated kingdom Year of Jubilee was there in himself. Matthew 12:25-28 and Luke 11:20 say that the kingdom was then among the people of Jesus' day in his person.² And in Luke 17:20-21 Jesus says that the kingdom is "within you"; that is, currently "among them" in the person of Jesus.³ In some sense the kingdom promised in the Old Testament was inaugurated in the life and earthly ministry of Jesus.⁴

But other passages in the New Testament are equally clear that God's kingdom is not yet fully and perfectly established on earth. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray that God's kingdom would come to earth, Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2. In Matthew 16:28, (also Luke 9:27) he predicted a time

yet in the future when the Son of Man would come in his kingdom. At the Last Supper, he told the disciples he would not enjoy the fruit of the vine with them until he came in his kingdom, Matthew 26; 29; Luke 22:16-18. At several points he spoke of a future gathering of the patriarchs in his kingdom, Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:28 and a time when the disciples would enjoy a favored place in the coming kingdom, Matthew 20:21; Luke 22:29-30. Jesus associates the signs of the end times with the arrival of the kingdom, Luke 21:31; c.f. 2 Timothy 4:1 and after his resurrection, the coming of his kingdom is still a future event.⁵

The kingdom was inaugurated with the coming of Christ, but not brought to fullness. Therefore the present age and the 'age to come' overlap. God has always and will always rule the universe. Though he has not yet established his rule over his earthly realm, Jesus has already begun his reign in the lives of those who have received him as the promised king and who are, therefore, citizens of his coming kingdom. Through the Church, God manifests his kingdom rule in the world.

Implications of the Kingdom for Christians Today

God has allowed Satan a measure of rule and authority over the earth: he is the prince of this world, and the god of this age, John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4. Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection won a decisive victory over Satan and his demonic empire. The hostile alien kingdom of demonic captivity, oppression and blindness is coming to an end, but the war is not over yet. We live in an age of vicious spiritual conflict.

The implications of the 'already/not yet' kingdom can be summarized by saying that because the kingdom is 'not yet', we should proclaim the good news of the kingdom and invite others to acknowledge the king here and now so they can enter the coming kingdom and enjoy its blessings. Also because the kingdom is 'already' we, its citizens, should live a kingdom lifestyle here and now.

Proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, often termed 'mission', is a front line attack on Satan's kingdom. It can only be successful when God's people are utterly dependent on God's power: prayerful dependence, relying on God's strength, trusting in the reality of His victory on the cross, and wearing the Spiritual Armour, that God provides for defeating Satan. The armour, listed in Ephesians 6:10-20, is God himself. It refers to God's clothing of His own saving attributes in Isaiah 11:5; 49:2; 52:7; 59:16-17. It is a battle of Satan against God.

Jesus himself developed one of the most important ramifications of the kingdom when his disciples asked him about his return to earth. After describing the signs that would precede his return, he told them that 'this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come', Matthew 24:14. The word for "world" is a word that means "the inhabited earth,"⁶ and the word for "nations" suggests individual people groups.⁷ This verse fills history with meaning and gives the Church its purpose. The consummation of the kingdom will come when the gospel of the kingdom has been proclaimed among every people group on earth. The scene in Revelation 7 confirms that every language and ethnic group will be represented around the throne of God, so it makes perfect sense that every group must hear the message of the gospel before the end. 'Consider the staggering fact that God has entrusted to people like us, redeemed sinners, the responsibility of carrying out His purpose in history'.⁸

Believers in Jesus Christ who see pain, injustice, poverty and warfare can do nothing greater to end the suffering of this present age than to proclaim the gospel to those who have never heard it. While it is certainly true that God has sovereignly determined the time of Christ's return, it is equally clear that

every people group on earth will have the opportunity to hear the gospel before Jesus' second coming. When we prioritise extending the gospel to unreached people groups, we are doing more than simply obeying the Lord's command (as important as that is!); we are also pursuing God's prerequisites for the establishment of his coming kingdom of perfect peace, prosperity and righteousness.

Kingdom Living Today

Proclaiming the gospel must always be integrated with works of compassion and a transformed ethic that offers a taste of the coming kingdom. Jesus' followers must proclaim and live out *shalom*. The Sermon on the Mount, is a poignant description of shalom. 'The coming of the Kingdom is to provide a tangible manifestation of God's attitude toward poverty and injustice. His people will grapple with the injustice that brings exploitation and poverty and will be particularly concerned to help the poor and the suffering'.⁹

Jesus' three parables in Matthew 25 each reflect a slightly different response that we should have towards the reality of the coming kingdom. The parable of the bridesmaids, verses 1-13, warns people to be prepared for the sudden return of the King. The parable of the talents, verses 14-30, emphasizes that kingdom citizens exhaustively expend the resources the King entrusts to them in service for Him, not for themselves.¹⁰ In the third parable, Jesus makes clear that kingdom citizens are identified by their works of loving compassion that glorify God and express kingdom values.

We conclude this chapter by looking at the awesome truths of the 'existing' kingdom of God, presented in Matthew 13. They can be summarized as proclaiming the presently 'mixed' ultimately triumphant, supremely valuable kingdom. Firstly the kingdom will expand through the proclamation of the king but only some will positively respond. There will therefore be a mixture of good and evil. Secondly, the present era of the kingdom will be characterized by an insignificant beginning, but that its impact will ultimately permeate the whole world.¹¹ Thirdly, the kingdom is immensely valuable. But this treasure is hidden and must be diligently sought. The worth of the kingdom is enormous, far greater than the supreme sacrifice of Christ's followers.¹²

Endnotes

1. Bauckham, Richard. 2003. *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, p 28
2. By driving out demons, Jesus was proving that he was greater than Satan. He was able to go into Satan's realm (the strong man's house) and come away with the spoils of victory (12:29). This was proof that he was God's promised king who had come in the power of the Spirit of God (as promised in the Old Testament) to destroy Satan's and establish God's kingdom. "Jesus saw his works of exorcisms as the Kingdom's preliminary assault on the power of evil in the land. At the cross he would fight these powers to the finish and thereby pave the way for the final exodus: eschatological redemption" Glasser, Arthur. 2003. *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, p 188.
3. In some translations Jesus says that the kingdom is "within you." But the Pharisees to whom he was speaking were rejecting Jesus as the Messiah and were not believers, so Jesus is not saying that they were believers who possessed a strictly spiritual kingdom inside of them. A better translation of the phrase is "in your midst" (TNIV, ESV, NET Bible) or "among you" (NRSV). Jesus' point was that he was standing right in their midst. Some feel that the force of the expression is "within your possession" or "within your reach."
4. Other verses that indicate that Jesus inaugurated the kingdom in his person during his first coming include Matthew 11:12; Luke 16:16, 21:5; Mark 11:10; Luke 19:38, 23:13; John 18:33-38; Romans 14:17-18; Colossians 1:12-13
5. Also Acts 1:5-8. When the disciples asked the resurrected Jesus if he was about to establish his kingdom, he did not tell them that they misunderstood the nature of the kingdom; rather he told them that the time of the coming kingdom was not their concern. Their concern was to be witnesses to every part of the world.
6. Bauer, Walter, Wilbur F. Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker. 1979. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). Logos electronic version.

7. “‘*Ethne*’ is an imprecise term that should not be pressed too hard. It means ‘people’ and does not necessarily involve a ‘unity of common descent, or a political unity or a linguistic unity.’” So *ethne* is not always an exact equivalent of the concept of “people group” as it is understood by anthropologists and missiologists. However, the word certainly encompasses that idea, (c.f. Bauer, Gingrich and Danker 1979 and Louw and Nida 1988, 1989), and” the obvious scope of the Great Commission embraces every cultural unity within the human family”(Glasser 2003, 237). Given his larger context (c.f. Matthew 28:18-20), Matthew’s use of *ethne* in 24:14 suggests ideas close to the meaning of “people group.” Louw, Johannes P. and Eugene A. Nida. 1988, 1989. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, (New York: United Bible Societies). Logos electronic version.
8. Ladd, George E. 1959. *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Cited in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 2009, Pasadena, CA: William Carey, p 93.
9. Glasser, 2003, p 216.
10. The third servant, who hoarded the resources given to him by the king (Matthew 25:18, 24-30) was acting as if he did not expect the king to ever return, and so demonstrated that he was not really a citizen of the kingdom.
11. Some see the parables of the yeast and the tree as teaching that the present era of the kingdom will be characterized by evil, since yeast is usually a symbol of evil in the Old Testament and the tree may be an illusion to Nebuchadnezzar’s pagan kingdom in Daniel 4. If that is the interpretation, then these two parables teach something similar to the lesson of the parables of the soil and the weeds: that the present era of the kingdom will be characterized by much evil.
12. Some see the man who purchases the field and the pearl to be Christ himself, who gave up everything in order to ensure the establishment of the kingdom and purchase its citizens for himself. This reading of the parable also emphasizes its value, but in a different way. Its value is demonstrated by what Christ gave up in order to redeem its citizens and secure the kingdom for them.

The Justice of God and Racism

*As 'children of God through faith in Christ Jesus...there is neither...Jew nor Greek...
for you are all one in Christ Jesus' Galatians 3:26-28*

A Biblical Foundation

The Bible celebrates diversity, giving us a tantalizing glimpse of a glorious, multi-ethnic multitude praising God in Revelation 7:9-10. The act of human creation unequivocally prescribes that every person is created in the image and likeness of God. Many times in the Bible, we learn that God is seeking all nations (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 1 Chronicles 16:24, 28; Psalms 22:27; 67:2; 86:9; 102:15; Isaiah 2:2; 49:6; 56:7; Matthew 28:19), and we know that Christ's redeeming work on the cross was for all creation, all peoples (Luke 24:47).

Many scriptures encourage us to care for strangers, the same as for our own family, and nation, (Exodus 22:21; 23:9, Jeremiah 22:3; Zechariah 7:10; Leviticus 19:33; Matthew 25:35). When strangers settle among us we are told not to discriminate and not to show any partiality (Leviticus 19:34, 24:22, Deuteronomy 10:17; 16:19, Proverbs 24:23; Matthew 22:16; Romans 2:11; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Timothy 5:21; James 2:9).

The gospels show Jesus talking with and meeting the needs of various people without discrimination (John 4; Matthew 15:22-28; Mark 7:25-30; Luke 17:12-19). On the day of Pentecost, the disciples spoke in the languages of every people group known to have God fearers present in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-11).

During biblical times and right up to today, God continues to ensure that his gospel goes out to all peoples, and not until it has reached every people group will he return (Mark 13:10). It seems that the only distinction God makes about people is between those who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and those who do not.

There is to be no disregard of life, no discrimination in the allocation of resources, and no undermining of equal rights and privileges for all people. This is firmly entrenched in the acts of creation and redemption, in the character of God, and is codified in the great command, "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31). God states that his disciples, his Church, are to be known by their unifying love (John 13:35; 17:23; Ephesians 4:1-6; 13; Colossians 3:12-14). There is to be no discrimination, and specifically none on the basis of race (Acts 10, Romans 10:12). This is for all time and is such a contrast to the separation and discrimination that happens today, not only among nation states, but among smaller people groups. The world seems to increasingly emphasise ethnocentricity.

Definitions of Racism

These have developed with the increasing understanding and acknowledgement of the abuse. From a monochromatic definition based on colour, definitions which reflect its functional, sociological, legal, historical, scientific, and institutional aspects are used in various contexts globally. David Wellman, in *Portraits of White Racism* (1993) described racism as 'culturally sanctioned beliefs, which, regardless of intentions involved, defend the advantages whites have because of the subordinated position of racial minorities'. Wellman's adherents argue that other groups are 'incapable of racism due to power difference' but as indigenous peoples continue to exercise their socio-political rights within new

democracies other minorities will argue that 'whites' aren't the only ones capable of racism. It therefore becomes apparent that racism is the exploit of those in power, regardless of colour. It is a system of group dominance, both structural and ideological, embodying political, economic and socio-cultural structures of inequality. It involves processes and practices of exclusion, oppression and marginalization (Pouzzner, 2004).

The definition adopted by the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1969 (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2012) states that "The term 'racial discrimination' shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life." It conveys the same message of equality expressed in as Galatians 3:28, 'neither Jew nor Greek'.

Recommendations for Christians Living and Working Cross-culturally

- When Christians live and work in a culture other than our own, it is imperative that we personally make every effort to be like the One who did not believe influence and power was something to cling to, but emptied himself to become obedient to death (Philippians 2:3-8). This is love.
- We must ask God to give us good cross cultural friends, cultivate the practice of mutual listening and learning, and honor the values and habits of our new culture.
- We must remember that even our theology is inculturated, and allow God's gospel and Kingdom to become established within the independence and sovereignty of the host culture: we should expect this work of God to look different everywhere.
- It is important to be aware that our cultural values and habits are deeply ingrained in us, and even unconsciously, can play out in relational behaviour we do not consciously intend, especially when new and insecure in another culture. A Christlike attitude will allow those we offend to tell us our offences. Honest and caring discussions about racism are important and helpful in building Christ reflecting relationships; offences can hurt far more deeply and longer term than an offender realizes. Colonial powers oppressed people groups, dislocated societies and disorientated cultures. They convinced people of inferiority; a grievous distortion, that even today adversely affects people's attitudes to relationships with people from previously colonial countries. Asking God to reveal mistakes and learning from these, helps us grow both spiritually and in our appreciation of the goodness that God has placed in another culture's relationships and practices. Mutual forgiveness is vital.
- Organisations with long histories in a particular country must ensure that offensive racial policies and practices of past eras, even from colonial times, are no longer reflected in current business methods. International Christian organizations must seek to reflect God in all values and relationships, and make leadership positions, including in resource management, available to everyone.

The Justice of God & Economic Disparities

*As 'children of God through faith in Christ Jesus...there is neither...slave nor free...
for you are all one in Christ Jesus' Galatians 3:26-28*

A Biblical Foundation

God created the world capable of supporting life (Genesis 1). Through our work, ordained by God before the Fall (Genesis 2:5 and 15), we steward resources to meet needs. This is the basis of economic theory. The just character of God is the foundation for justice in relationships at all social levels: family, local community, institutional, national, global. Any abuse of power in these relationships and its consequences dishonors God in both the oppressed and the oppressor, because both bear His image (Genesis 1:26). Thus it is people, influenced by Satan, who are responsible for poverty, and for the deficient, unjust and corrupt global systems and practices.

Galatians 3:28 calls Christians back to the original order in which God provided everything for the common good. Attitudes that motivate work to reflect pre-fall relationships can be more effective in promoting justice than those that accept the post-fall situation.

Christians are to love and respect one another equally, regardless of whether we are rich or poor, (John 13:34, James 2:1-6). Within our existing social structures, in practice this can require repeated reminders for our hearts and minds, a determined willingness to listen to one another, and the introduction of systems which truly reflect the dynamics of transparency, honesty, and integrity.

Internationally, different cultures may view Biblical stewardship differently. This can cause difficulties or misunderstandings for international transactions. Such misunderstandings need to be dealt with, respecting both cultures. Often international leadership is assumed by those with resources, but resource possession does not equate with superiority, or a right to leadership in the Bible. There are several biblical examples of God's appointment of leaders, rarely, if ever, chosen for their physical or financial wealth. For example, in Acts 6, Stephen was chosen to lead the work of caring for poor widows because he was 'full of God's grace and power'.

Jesus' model of holistic training, entrusting responsibilities, review, serving, loving, and handing over responsibilities at the right time should be followed in Christian relief and development ministries. Sometimes handing over power is deferred or difficult. An attitude which considers others better than oneself can minimize the difficulties of these scenarios (Philippians 2:3-4).

Caring for Christians in Need

God has grafted us all into a community which is unique in two ways: 1) our worship of God; 2) our loving relationships which reflect God's character (John 13:34-35). God gives us gifts for building up his body so that each person can become all that God intends (Ephesians 4:11-13). When we lovingly use our skills, abilities or resources for others in Christ's body, e.g. in meeting physical needs, we acknowledge God's image in every person.

In Deuteronomy 15:7 and 11, God tells his people not to be hard-hearted or tightfisted, but open handed. He encourages us not to become weary, but to give as He gives— very generously (Romans

8:32). Currently people talk about donor fatigue. Others talk about those who give physically or financially receiving spiritually far more from materially poorer Christians. Mutuality is a hallmark of thriving relationships in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:6-8, Ephesians 4:11-13).

Relationships among the World's Rich and Poor

Jesus commands his followers to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to obey everything he commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus taught us to care for the poor. He taught that materialism was dangerous because it pulls people away from God and the poor (Luke 6:24, and Luke 8, 12, and 16). Jesus says that in caring for the poor, we care for him (Matthew 25:40). Many of the rich give generously. Both the rich and the poor must learn to trust him. Throughout Christian history, the gospel has been proclaimed to the poor, possibly much more than to the rich. God's Kingdom needs the salvation and spiritual maturity of the rich to avoid the tremendous oppression of the poor.

Matthew 25 encourages caring for people who are sick, dying, marginalized, stigmatized, poor, hungry, displaced, imprisoned, orphaned, and more. All such ministries go hand in hand with proclaiming the gospel and discipling believers towards maturity in Christ. Resources and methods change with time. Methods which cultivate mutuality and respect for the contributions of everyone are highly preferred. Pointers for thought, particularly in community development are:

- It should be locally owned and rooted – expatriates are typically short-term visitors
- Help people pursue their dreams and solutions, rather than expatriates 'fix problems'.
- Ravi Jayakaran's 10 seed principle – a great tool for community identification of its development
- Asset Based Community Development. This reflects the Holy Spirit's giving of gifts for the building up of one another and for the common good.
- Importance of local Community Based Organisations, local management, local cultural values
- Encouraging local income generation through vocational training and business enterprises: we are designed to work.
- Government Strategic development plans and the Millennium Development Goals
- Maximization of integrated development, e.g. health, sanitation, water and agriculture
- Working relationally, (rather than tight task pursuits), helps sustainability
- Always respecting the dignity of all people, particularly poor people: this is sometimes not seen in public news of disasters

Christians have always sought to alleviate poverty, mostly directly. In the past less has been done to address the systemic and institutional roots of poverty, but this is now being addressed more. Also today there is more publicity about people who have suffered extreme oppression through social, including international, systems: trafficked victims, landless widows, runaways, child soldiers, the food insecure through food pricing. Proverbs 31: 8-9 tells us to be a voice for the voiceless. In doing so, we seek God's kingdom reign over institutions and systems.

Gender Equality

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith... There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:26, 28

It is vital that we show equal care and respect for both genders, mindful that we “are all one in Christ Jesus”. However, as the global norm is usually to grant more opportunity to men than to women, the following discussion examines inequities in the treatment of women.

A Biblical Basis

Discrimination on the basis of gender is unacceptable. God ordained our equal value and dignity when he made male and female in his image and likeness, and conferred lordship over creation (Genesis 1:26-28). The fall negatively impacts all relationships. The broken relationship between man and woman (Genesis 3:16, “he will rule over you”) is a sign of sin and not the intention of God in creation; it is not a decree, but a forecasted consequence of sin. The mission of people of the Kingdom is not to permanently establish the conditions of the fall, nor to live facing the past, but to restore of all things in Christ. As our prime example, Jesus encouraged, valued and affirmed women in a society that did the opposite.

Masculinity, Femininity, and the Value of Women

Biological sex determines if a person is male or female. Gender is not biological, but rather, is the learned sociological interpretation of the roles men and women fill. Today gender equality is a recognized human right. However, strict gender roles often still thwart the potential of girls and women, and in some situations give them little say about their own aspirations in life.

Women are vulnerable to horrific abuses as well to having less access to food, health care, education, and economic opportunity than men. Empowering women is indispensable for reducing poverty and for lasting development in any human context, including church development. If we do not make room for the full participation of women in the church and ministry, we disable the potential of the church by limiting the use of at least half its body.

The Church

It is the role of church leaders to move away from condoning traditional oppressive gender attitudes, and to move the church along to a more Christ-like understanding of the roles and value of men and women. The church is a powerful and strong influence in society. It can simply reflect the dominant culture, or through modelling and advocacy, it can challenge it to change both traditionally oppressive gender attitudes and the societal systems that maintain them. While the church certainly must focus on evangelism, it is vital that they also give equal attention to discipleship and to the changed attitudes and behaviours that are holy and authentic reflections of God’s character and intentions.

Men’s Attitudes toward Women in Christian Marriage

In male dominated societies, men as husbands, fathers, and community and religious leaders often have enormous power in women’s lives. Even in these societies, Christian marriage should be understood as a partnership of equals. In marriage, neither spouse should seek to dominate the other. Rather, they should defer to one another, and each should consider the other as better than oneself (Phil. 2:3). It is

suggested the following be discussed in the context of marriage-related discipleship:

- **Headship:** (Eph. 5:23; 1Cor.11:3): God, in the beginning, put all things under the power of Jesus. Through his life and teaching, Jesus teaches and exemplifies what to be “head of” means. Rather than supremacy, the concept conveys order, virtue and sacrificial service (Mark 10:43-45; John 13:3-17).
- **Submission:** Paul urges that all believers “submit to one another out of reverence to Christ” (Eph. 5:21). He also establishes that a special submission in the marriage relationship has a limiting and exclusive condition: “as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:2). Peter teaches a mutual consideration, and reminds men that women are “joint-heirs of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). In the marriage relationship, God has set a high standard for men as they are called to love their wives “just as Christ loved the church” (Eph. 5:25). God never meant for women to be subservient to men, as has happened in so many cultures. “It is important to distinguish between ‘subjection’ and ‘submission’. The former involves being forced to submit to the leadership of another and is a consequence of the fall, and thus not a part of God’s original plan” (Adeyemo, 16). A wife’s submission to a husband is a voluntary sacrifice for order in the relationship, not to establish any inequities. This type of submission is demonstrated by Christ himself as he expresses his willing submission to the Father, “No one takes it (my life) from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again” (John 10:18).
- **The Glory of Man:** Men and women are to reveal the glory of God. As a part of this, the woman has to be restored to her position of reflecting the “glory of man” (1 Cor. 11:7). This reflection is achieved when the well-being of the woman reveals the goodness of the man related to her (not the other way round). “In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman” (1 Cor. 11:11).

Biblical values are modelled differently in different cultures, and likewise, gender equality will take different forms in different cultures. It is also understood that women serve a strong role in the protection and perpetuation of culture, even in knowingly or unwittingly maintaining unjust systems against their own gender. The important issue is that we do our part to ensure that Christian men and women are not limiting the potential of girls and women by making assumptions and decisions about the females’ aspirations in life. This begins with developing a consciousness that women are not things, that they are not less than men, that they are not second class members of the church, and that to treat them as though they were is simply not good in God’s eyes. Rather, Christian leaders should overtly teach and model an enthusiasm for all girls and women to reach their full, God-given potential. Galatians 3:28 makes it clear that there are no second class children of God.

Engaging the Church to Promote Gender Justice in Society

Some injustices against women are taboo. To avoid scandal or shame to the name of Christ, the victims are effectively silenced by force or by cultural expectations. In this context we must gently encourage the church to courageously take a stand. Churches should identify root causes of exploitations, which often relate back to accepted cultural practices, attitudes or systems. It is imperative that God’s people work at upstream prevention, as well as downstream care.

Global Concerns

The most pervasive forms of gender inequality in communities are manifest in gender-based violence, economic discrimination, health inequalities, and harmful traditional practices. Where a cultural practice runs clearly against God’s character, his children should address it.

- *Gender-based violence:* The worst atrocities against women usually occur in their own home, sustained by codes of silence and denial.
- *Economic discrimination:* Economic empowerment begins with education.
- *Health Inequalities:* Women comprise about half of all those living with HIV worldwide, and in some areas even more. It is vital to address women's needs for HIV prevention, treatment and care. Are we effectively responding to the feminization of the AIDS pandemic?
- *Human Trafficking:* 27 million slaves exist in the world, the majority of victims are women and children. This horrific abuse and commoditization of human beings is a global injustice that God's people must address.

In order to better reflect God's global church, Christians should seek greater inclusion of the voice of women. Particularly where tradition has effectively silenced the voice of women, God's people must actively pursue and empower their voice. How wonderful it will be to see God's church thrive worldwide when the full array of gifts is fully deployed and the full restoration of the dignity and equality of women is expressed in all spheres of life.

Recommendations

- *Teach and model biblical equality.*
- *In keeping with an individual church's position on women in pastoral or elder leadership, encourage the appointment of women to various leadership and committee positions. Invite gifted women as special event speakers.*
- *Where participation is weak or limited to specific areas, encourage wider participation of women in ministry and church life, with their involvement determined by their gifting.*
- *Encourage men to transform their view of women and their behaviour toward women; to value them as Christ does: not as objects but as full persons, equal in emotional, intellectual, and spiritual capacity.*
- *In discipleship and in church teaching, encourage husbands to fully consult with their wives in decisions that affect their family.*
- *Encourage and stand with church leaders as they deal with taboo gender injustice issues, applying their learning from breaking the HIV/AIDS taboo to dealing with issues of gender violence, etc.*
- *Change the understanding of masculinity that allows for the resolution of conflict through violence toward women in the home.*
- *Instead of harmful or demeaning rights of passages for girls, develop Christ-centred alternatives.*

Injustices Against Children

Almost ten million children die every year, most of these from malaria, diarrhea, and pneumonia. Additionally, over 40 million children are aborted globally each year. Even when children survive birth and infancy, living can mean being sick, hungry, exploited, uneducated, and bearing the blunt of unjust disparities. These things are always significantly worse for the girl child. For no reason other than that she is female, the girl child is less likely to have adequate nutrition, less likely to receive health care, less likely to go to school, more likely to be abused, and more likely to be exploited in the sex industry.

“Because the world’s children are in no way to blame for what they have to endure, they represent a mirror to us of the evils the world tolerates, accepts, or excuses” (Myers, 100). Children are voiceless and powerless to change their situation. We must be their voice. In speaking for the voiceless (Proverbs 31:8), we can also actively oppose race, economic, and gender discrimination insidiously leveled against children.

Biblical Basis for Concern for the Injustices Faced by Children

While children are on the periphery in society, they are central in God’s kingdom. Children are central in God’s plan of restoration of all things:

- The “seed” of the woman would bruise the head of the Serpent (Gen 3:15). While "seed" covers the range of ideas from a single embryo to generations of descendants, the concept requires children in order to be fulfilled.
- The “seed” of Abraham was counted in the continuation of the perennial covenant of grace that God made with Abraham (Gen 17:7, 9, 19, 21).
- The children were spared in the Exodus and were the ones set apart to enter and inherit the covenant’s land of promise (Num14:31).
- The children, as subjects with fundamental rights and duties, are present at the repetition and renewal of the covenant before entering the Land of promises (together with others who normally suffered as victims of oppression: women, servants and the foreigner) (Deut 29: 9-14; 31:10-13);
- The children are the key indicator that the messianic age has arrived: a child will shepherd the lion and the lamb-- they are the key indicator of the wholesome restoration and Shalom (Isaiah 9 and 11; and Isaiah 65: 17-24)! God ordains praise from the mouths of children, even from newborns (Psalm 8:2). From their earliest days children cannot but glorify God, and so reveal that they are part of the foundation of his divine system on earth.
- Children are to be treasured as gifts from God; Psalm 127:3: “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him.”
- Children are central in Jesus’ priorities: “Let the little children come to me.” Children are vindicated in their position in the Kingdom of Heaven as subjects with rights, duties, social protection and responsibility (Mark10:14; Matt 18:1-10).
- Children are in the vision of revelations and at the end of history and they will celebrate at the throne (Rev. 19:5)!
- The children are considered by God as persons in the full scope of their development, even from their very embryonic conception. Hence, they are subjects of rights, empowerment and purpose in God’s plans. (Ex 21:22-25; Psalm 139:13-16; Is 49:1; Jer. 1:5; Ezek 16: 4-6; Luke 1:15).

- A restored world is prophetically envisioned only when the hearts of the parents (adults) are turned to the children (Mal 4:6 and Luke 1:17)

God values children in their present child-like state, not only as the future adults of the world.

In many societies children are not valued equally with adults, yet they bear God's image, his essence, dignity and value from conception. If every church was encouraged to think strategically and creatively about reaching out to the children in its community on every level - physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually – what a difference that could make to communities bearing testimony to God's kingdom rule.

Education: The urgency and priority of Christian education as a way of transforming flawed worldviews is a conviction that has been heard from church leaders in South America, Asia, and Africa. Girls' education is particularly imperative, with potential to alleviate poverty and improve health.

Protection from Abuse: A child can suffer abuse even before birth, and once born, may face psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Tragically, child abuse also occurs in Christian homes and ministries. Yet God's people are strategically placed in many parts of the world and could exert tremendous influence in this area with families and for society, discipling parents to defend the Rights of the Child within the framework of a biblical worldview.

Churches can help communities move away from a worldview that sees children as the parents' possessions, and toward an understanding that children have dignity and rights from God. Parenting is a form of stewardship: responsibly developing the God-given potential in each child for God's glory. We can tirelessly teach and disciple this.

Protection from Oppression: Advocacy for children in dire circumstances such as bonded labor, trafficking, child conscription, and domestic abuse is important. When we choose to remain silent over these severe abuses, we risk our silence being read as condoning them.

Climate: Climate and population shifts threaten recent advances in child rights. Children are particularly vulnerable due to their physiological immaturity and their sensitivity to many of the main killers of young children – including under-nutrition and vector borne diseases. Increasing evidence suggests that the world's least developed countries, which have burgeoning child populations, will bear the brunt of environmental shifts. Greater stresses on economic resources, food and water supplies will potentially exacerbate existing inequities in income and access to essential services. The repercussions of economic and climactic shocks will span generations, undermining efforts to advance the wellbeing of children for decades. Nevertheless, history shows that such crises can also be tipping points for change.

Christians and churches must encourage one another to proactively work for children in a holistic way – protecting, educating, and defending them wherever necessary.

Recommendations

- *Explore how to be a voice for children.*
- *In developing a children's ministry it is vital not to isolate the child from the family that shapes and cares for him or her.*
- *Seek parents' consent before engaging in a ministry to their children.*
- *Work to strengthen not just marriages, but entire families.*

- *Involve children in churches*
- *Encourage all ministry and project leaders to ask: “How does this ministry or project impact children?” or “What are the needs of children that could be met through this ministry or project?”*
- *Ask children what kind of world they would like to live in and help them work towards it.*
- *Help fellow believers move away from a philosophy that children are a possession belonging to the parents, and toward the understanding that they are individuals with dignity and rights entrusted to their parents by God to be developed for his glory.*
- *Help churches become involved in general education with a Christian worldview, including an emphasis on giving girls an education that is on par with that of boys.*
- *Build adequate toilet facilities for the restricted use of girls. It has been suggested that, sometimes, when girls begin to menstruate, they are not able to privately take care of their needs (and are ridiculed by boys), so they stop going to school.*
- *Partner together to courageously break the societal silence on child abuse. We must teach at every opportunity, and especially in discipleship settings, that violence against children is never acceptable.*
- *Actively work together against the injustice committed against the girl child, including discrimination and abuse toward girl children through child marriage, exploitation, girl child labour, female genital mutilation, and selective abortion.*

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(Only those indicated with * are directly cited in chapters 4-7 of the paper modified for the Micah Network)

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