

Social Justice – How Can It Happen?

In our context Social Justice is very much about living our lives in such a way that the love and grace of God is manifested in our everyday lives to people at every level of society.

It can be further defined as working towards the realization of a world where all members of a society, regardless of background, have an equal opportunity to experience the benefits and reality of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

In many cases the lack of Social Justice is so much an accepted part of church culture and our religious mindset that we don't even realize our level of inaction.

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

—Edmund Burke

The Mandate

We believe that a Mandate has been given to us based on how we at CAG are to carry out the purpose God has for us. It is found in Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25 and is ministry carried forth through love and compassion.

Isaiah 58 (NKJV) **1** "Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Don't be timid. Tell my people Israel of their sins! **2** Yet they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day and seem delighted to learn all about me. They act like a righteous nation that would never abandon the laws of its God. They ask me to take action on their behalf, pretending they want to be near me. **3** 'We have fasted before you!' they say. 'Why aren't you impressed? We have been very hard on ourselves, and you don't even notice it!' "I will tell you why!" I respond. "It's because you are fasting to please yourselves. Even while you fast, you keep oppressing your workers. **4** What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me. **5** You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like reeds bending in the wind. You dress in burlap and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the Lord?

6 "No, this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. **7** Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. **8** "Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you

forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind. **9** Then when you call, the Lord will answer. 'Yes, I am here,' he will quickly reply. "Remove the heavy yoke of oppression. Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors! **10** Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon. **11** The Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. **12** Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as a builder of walls and a restorer of homes. **13** "Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don't pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the Lord's holy day. Honor the Sabbath in everything you do on that day, and don't follow your own desires or talk idly. **14** Then the Lord will be your delight. I will give you great honor and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor Jacob. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

"Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Don't be timid. Tell my people Israel of their sins! (v1)

The prophet cries against the people's sins like a mighty trumpet blast; the transgression and hypocrisy of God's people must be revealed. If God's messengers fail to point out the sins of God's people, they are not faithful to God's call. (FLSB note Isaiah 58:1)

The Holy Spirit had hypocrites of every age in view. Self-love and timid Christians may say, Spare thyself; dislike to the cross and other motives will say, "Spare the rich and powerful;" but God says, "Spare not:" and we must obey God, not men. We all need earnestly to pray for God's assistance in examining ourselves. Men may go far toward heaven, yet come short; and they may go to hell with a good reputation.

- Matthew Henry

Yet they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day and seem delighted to learn all about me. They act like a righteous nation that would never abandon the laws of its God. They ask me to take action on their behalf, pretending they want to be near me. (v2)

They were seeking God every day as though they desire to know His ways yet, at the same time they were living in sin and indifference to His righteous commands. Today congregations may worship the Lord outwardly, appear to delight in praising Him, and seem eager to know His ways; at the same time, they may be conforming to the ways of the world and neglecting the diligent study of His Word. Such "worship" is an insult and an abomination to God. (FLSB note Isaiah 58:2)

A fast is a day to afflict the soul; if it does not express true sorrow for sin, and does not promote the putting away of sin, it is not a fast. These professors had shown sorrow on stated or occasioned fasts. But they indulged pride, covetousness, and malignant passions. To be liberal and merciful is more acceptable to God than mere fasting, which, without them, is vain and hypocritical. Many who seem humble in God's house, are hard at home, and harass their families. But no man's faith justifies, which does not work by love. Yet persons, families, neighborhoods, churches, or nations, show repentance and sorrow for sin, by keeping a fast sincerely, and, from right motives, repenting, and doing good works. The heavy yoke of sin and oppression must be removed. As sin and sorrow dry the bones and weaken the strongest human constitution; so the duties of kindness and charity strengthen and refresh both body and mind. Those who do justly and love mercy, shall have the comfort, even in this world. Good works will bring the blessing of God, provided they are done from love to God and man, and wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit.

– Matthew Henry

‘We have fasted before you!’ they say. ‘Why aren’t you impressed? We have been very hard on ourselves, and you don’t even notice it!’ ‘I will tell you why!’ I respond. ‘It’s because you are fasting to please yourselves. Even while you fast, you keep oppressing your workers. (v3)

God’s people were complaining that He would not help them. But God knew that their worship and their fasting were hypocritical. He tells them that no religious act has any value to Him if it does not come from those who humbly seek to obey His commandments and who compassionately reach out to those in need. (FLSB note Isaiah 58:3)

They were turned inward and began to complain!

They were self-righteous

4 What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me. **5** You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like reeds bending in the wind. You dress in burlap and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the Lord?

God's way

6-7 "No, this is the kind of fasting I want:

- Free those who are wrongly imprisoned
- Lighten the burden of those who work for you.
- Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people.
- Share your food with the hungry
- Give shelter to the homeless.
- Give clothes to those who need them
- Do not hide from relatives who need your help.

The Fast That I Have Chosen. The fast that God approves is one accompanied by love for Him and genuine concern for those who are oppressed. Believers must understand that the giving of tithes and offerings to the church does not free them from their responsibility to give to the poor. We should share our food with the hungry and provide clothing for those who have none. We must make a sincere effort to determine the needs of others, especially within our local congregations, and to commit ourselves to helping in whatever way we can. the blessings of verse 8 are given to those who have the heart of verse 6 and are committed to the course of action in verse 7. (FLSB note Isaiah 58:6)

8-9a "Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the Lord will answer. 'Yes, I am here,' he will quickly reply.

◆ It's the favor of the Lord on the Church

Then Your Light Shall Break Forth. When there is true love for God and sincere concern for the welfare of others, a channel is opened for God's full blessing to come into our lives. The rewards for such love are stated here:

- 1) The light of God and the full joy of salvation and healing.
- 2) God's protection and presence manifested in our lives.
- 3) God's help in trouble through answered prayer.
- 4) The lifting of darkness and oppression.
- 5) God's guidance, strength and fruitfulness.
- 6) True restoration, with the revival of God's standards and ideals.
(FLSB note Isaiah 58:8-12)

◆ It's conditional

- "Remove the heavy yoke of oppression. 9b
- Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors! **10**
- Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble.

Then

- Your light will shine out from the darkness
- The darkness around you will be as bright as noon.
- **11** The Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. 11
- You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring.
- **12** Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as a builder of walls and a restorer of homes. 13

A man came to the pastor one time and said, "I don't know what's wrong with my life, but that first Christian joy I knew has passed by. I still live a moral life. I go to church. But how can I recover the lost radiance of my faith?" His pastor said, "this is what you should do: go to the store and buy a big basketful of groceries and go to an address of a poor family I will give you. Then when you have given your gift, you sit down with them to find out what they need. Let them know that you are interested in them and that you are their friend. Then lead them in the Lord's Prayer before you leave, and the radiance will come back."

13 "Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don't pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the Lord's holy day. Honor the Sabbath in everything you do on that day, and don't follow your own desires or talk idly. **14** Then the Lord will be your delight. I will give you great honor and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor Jacob. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

Matthew 25:31-46 (NKJV) "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. 33 "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying,

'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?
38 'When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?
39 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "And the
King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it
to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' 41 "Then He will also
say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting
fire prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 'for I was hungry and you gave Me
no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43 'I was a stranger and you did
not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did
not visit Me.' 44 "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see
You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not
minister to You?' 45 "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you,
inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'
46 "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into
eternal life."

v 35-36

I was hungry and you gave Me food.
I was thirsty and you gave Me drink.
I was a stranger and you took Me in.
I was naked and you clothed Me.
I was sick and you visited Me.
I was in prison and you came to Me.

V 42-23

I was hungry and you gave Me no food.
I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink.
I was a stranger and you did not take Me in.
I was naked and you did not clothe Me.
I was sick and you did not visit Me.
I was in prison and you did not visit Me.

A little fellow in the ghetto was teased by one who said, "If God loves you, why doesn't he take care of you? Why doesn't God tell someone to bring you shoes and a warm coat and better food?" The little lad thought for a moment then with tears starting in his eyes, said, "I guess He does tell somebody, but somebody forgets." God's plan is to care through His followers and that caring is the fruit of goodness.

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when ...

Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me

Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when ...

I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.

Our Directive - God has a plan:

Joshua 6:1-2 (NKJV) **"Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel;** none went out, and none came in. 2 And the LORD said to Joshua: "See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor.

Matthew 16:18b (NKJV) "... I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

1) The Lord gave Joshua the specific plan for taking the city.

Josh 6:3-5 (NKJV) "You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. 4 "And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. 5 "It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him."

Joshua instructs and begins to lead the people in accordance to the word of the Lord. Joshua 6:6-19 (NKJV)

When the people responded in obedience to God's direction through Joshua they were victorious.

Joshua 6:20 (NKJV) "So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. **Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.**

Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

➤ **The people continued in obedience. Josh 6:21-26 (NKJV)**

This "every man" concept has taken on a greater prominence than ever as we look forward to our future.

Although this is something God dropped in my spirit years ago as we look around this seems to be the approach He is using to build the largest churches in the world.

Richard Baxter wrote a book called *The Reformed Pastor*. He wrote in 1656 and he said this: I marvel how I can preach slightly and coldly. How I can let men alone in their sins and that I do not go to them and beseech them for the Lord's sake to repent; however they take it and whatever pains or troubles it should cost me.

I seldom come out of the pulpit but my conscience smites me that I have been no more serious and fervent than I have. It accuses me not so much for want of human ornaments or elegance, not for letting fall an uncomely word, but it asks me:

How could you speak of life and death with such a heart?

Shouldst thou not weep over such a people and should not thy tears interrupt thy words?

Should not thou cry aloud and show them their transgressions and entreat and beseech them as for life and death.