

WISDOM UNIVERSITY

PROVERBS 3:13-20

SOCIAL JUSTICE



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

What is social justice?

"Social justice" is a term that few of us had heard until recently. Now it's mainstream in our culture, and even in many churches. But what does it mean?

If we look up a dictionary, the words simply mean "justice in society", which all Christians support. We all surely want a fair society that treats everyone the same before the law regardless of color, age, gender, etc. And we don't just want equal treatment before the law; we also seek fair treatment for all in all walks of life and oppose all bigotry and prejudice.

However, if ask our culture what "social justice" means, we get a much more political definition. It has more to do with environmentalism, punitive redistribution of wealth, reparations, anti-capitalism, positive discrimination, the redefinition of marriage and gender, and transgender rights

I could provide a biblical analysis of this social justice movement. I could offer a constructive critique that highlights its pros (e.g. it's desire for a better society) and cons (e.g. it's definition of a just society and the methods used in getting there). However, this is such a political hot potato that I fear it could inflame passions and be spiritually unprofitable. I've linked to some articles at the end if you want to follow up on that.

In this sermon, though, I'd like to simply provide an exposition of a key passage in Proverbs that highlights the advantages of pursuing the Bible's view of social justice. I hope to show that if we followed the Bible's teaching on this, it would transform our society in a wonderful way. Indeed, such a just society would be a powerful argument for Christianity.

CONTEXT

In Proverbs 2-3, God calls us to enroll in Wisdom University by highlighting the benefits of being a student in his school:

- Moral benefits of Wisdom (2:5-21)
- Material benefits of Wisdom (3:1-12)
- Emotional benefits of Wisdom (3:13-20)
- Social benefits of Wisdom (3:21-35)

In recent weeks we've considered the moral, material, and emotional benefits of Wisdom. These benefits are repeatedly connected to a right relationship with God through Wisdom.

Having got the vertical relationship right, Solomon moves on to the horizontal relationships. This sermon on the social benefits of Wisdom, assumes that the reader has got right with God and is now moving outwards to ensure that he is right with his fellow men and women.

We could say, having been justified by faith alone for his salvation (Romans 3), he now moves on to be justified by works for his witness (James 2).



So, what are the social benefits of Christianity?



1. A JUST SOCIETY WAS GOD'S BEAUTIFUL PLAN (19-26)

God made the world perfect (19)

"The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths were broken up, and clouds drop down the dew" (19-20).

If we are going to improve society, we must start with the Designer, Creator, and Preserver of it. The ultimate Creator, Governor, and Sustainer of society gives us the right starting-point. We need to get God's relationship to the world right if we are going to get our relationships to the world right.

God gave perfect values to order the world

"My son, let them not depart from your eyes—Keep sound wisdom and discretion; so they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck. Then you will walk safely in your way, and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet" (21-24).

Having defined God's relationship to the world, Solomon moves on to God's relationship to humanity. In his Word, God gave his wisdom and values to the human race so that we could enjoy life, grace, safety, peace, and rest.

God's perfect plan has been marred

"When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught" (24-26).

Verse 24 hints at the spoiling of God's perfect order with its mention of stumbling into danger and fear through the night. In verses 25-26, the hints of danger are amplified into blaring sirens and flashing blue lights. We see and hear of "sudden terror...trouble from the wicked...our feet being caught." Something terrible has happened to spoil and upset the world's beauty and order. That something is sin, personal sin. Social justice, from God's perspective, therefore, begins with repenting of personal sin.

APPLICATION

♥ Let us worship God for his goodness to us in creating a beautiful world. He made a just society with beautiful and perfect values. We must start with God and his original created order if we are to re-discover and re-create the ideal world.

♥ Let us confess our personal sinful contribution to spoiling God's creation and order. We mustn't start by blaming the rich, or the government, or corporations. We start with our sin and our responsibility. If everyone did that, then a just society would be within reach.

PROGRESS IN SOCIAL JUSTICE BEGINS
WHEN WE CONFESS PERSONAL INJUSTICE



If sin has marred God's perfect world, is there any hope of restoration?



2. A JUST SOCIETY STARTS WITH LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR (27-32)

The second great commandment is “love your neighbor as yourself.” This sums up God’s social justice plan. Let’s look at some of the details.

Help your poor neighbor (27-28)

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,’ when you have it with you” (27-28).

- Give good, not just do no harm
- Give good, not just money
- Give good wages to those who earned them
- Give good when you have the ability
- Give good without delay.

Protect your innocent neighbor (29-30)

“Do not devise evil against your neighbor, for he dwells by you for safety’s sake. Do not strive with a man without cause, if he has done you no harm” (29-30).


- Secure your neighbor and his property rather than planning evil against him/her
- Pursue peace with your neighbor, rather than start unnecessary conflict
- Give the benefit of the doubt rather than think the worst


Beware of your evil neighbor (31-32)

“Do not envy the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the perverse person is an abomination to the Lord, but his secret counsel is with the upright” (31-32).

- Don’t be envious of the wicked’s success
- Don’t follow the wicked’s ways
- Don’t become an abomination to God

APPLICATION

 The core of biblical justice is love your neighbor as yourself. When you see someone being mistreated, ask yourself, “How would I like to be treated like this? Seeking justice is part of pleasing God in our daily lives (Micah 6:8).

 Who is my neighbor? Anyone in need that we come across in our daily lives or in our daily internet use. Social justice includes social media and faraway countries, but it begins with neighbors and colleagues.

SOCIAL JUSTICE BEGINS NEXT DOOR



Even if I do all that, it's not going to make much difference to society.
Is God ever going to put everything right?



3. A JUST SOCIETY WILL BE ESTABLISHED BY GOD'S JUSTICE (33-35)

While we should pursue a just society according to God's definition and God's plan, we realize that progress in this world will always be limited. But there is a time coming when social justice will be established everywhere.

"The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the just. Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble. The wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the legacy of fools" (33-35).

God blesses the just in this world

However things look outwardly, God's blessing is on the home of the just. Whether we succeed or not in making much progress towards a just society, God blesses the just who seek justice. He gives grace to the humble, which is better than getting gold through proud oppression.

God will give a just world to the just

God will ultimately give heavenly glory to the wise. "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

God will give justice to the unjust

- Instead of blessing, the unjust are already cursed by God (33)
- Instead of God's grace, they already have his scorn (34; James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).
- Instead of future glory they will get future disgrace (35)

APPLICATION

♥ Moderate your present expectations of a just society. But maximize your expectations for the eternal society. Imagine a world in which righteousness dwells everywhere. What a world! What a society! What a future!

♥ Make sure you have secured your place in the just society of heaven before you seek a just society on earth. If you've secured your place there, try to persuade others to join you. Then work together for a just society on earth.

SOCIAL JUSTICE WILL NOT SAVE YOU
FROM ETERNAL JUSTICE.



CONCLUSION



PRAYER: Just God, I confess my contribution to social injustice. Help me to show how getting right with God is the best way to a just society.

FURTHER STUDY

Online Articles

- [Is Social Justice a Gospel Issue?](#) by Kevin DeYoung.
- [What Christians should know about social justice](#) by Joe Carter.
- [Social Justice is not about Justice](#) by Jared Longshore
- [Do we believe the whole Gospel?](#) by R. C. Sproul.

Books

- [Generous Justice: How God's Grace makes us Just](#) by Tim Keller

Discussion Questions

1. How would you explain the modern concept of social justice? What are the pros and cons of the term?
2. What are the differences and overlaps between biblical justice and social justice?
3. What are some of the ways in which you've contributed to the world's injustice?
4. What can you do today to love your neighbor?
5. How can the church better show the social benefits of Christianity?
6. What's right/wrong about this statement? "Christian's should focus on personal conversion, not social justice."
7. How does the Christian view of heaven impact social justice?

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SOCIAL JUSTICE

NEVERTHELESS WE, ACCORDING TO HIS PROMISE, LOOK FOR NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH IN WHICH RIGHTEOUSNESS DWELLS. 2 PETER 3:13



Social justice promises to restore justice to world

Biblical answer?





A just society was God's beautiful plan

- God made the world perfect
- God gave perfect values to world
- God's perfect plan's been marred

PROGRESS IN SOCIAL JUSTICE BEGINS WHEN WE CONFESS PERSONAL INJUSTICE

Any hope of restoration?





A just society starts with loving our neighbor

- Help you poor neighbor
- Protect your innocent neighbor
- Beware of your evil neighbor

SOCIAL JUSTICE BEGINS NEXT DOOR

Will it ever be put right?

A just society will be established by God's justice

- God blesses the just in world
- God will give just world to just
- God will give justice to unjust

SOCIAL JUSTICE WILL NOT SAVE YOU FROM ETERNAL JUSTICE

Action?




Get right with God and do right for God to witness for God