

# COS Statement on Biblical Justice

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.<sup>1</sup> **The Apostle Paul in Romans**

*The secular community, since it exists for our natural good and not for our supernatural, has no higher end than to facilitate and safeguard the family, and friendship, and solitude. Great sacrifices of this private happiness by those who have it may be necessary in order that it may be more widely distributed. All may have to be a little hungry in order that none may starve. But do not let us mistake necessary evils for good. The mistake is easily made. Fruit has to be tinned if it is to be transported, and has to lose thereby some of its good qualities. But one meets people who have learned actually to prefer the tinned fruit to the fresh. A sick society must think much about politics, as a sick man must think much about his digestion: to ignore the subject may be fatal cowardice for the one as for the other. But if either comes to regard it as the natural food of the mind – if either forgets that we think of such things only in order to be able to think of something else – then what was undertaken for the sake of health has become itself a new and deadly disease...<sup>2</sup> **C. S. Lewis***

Recent events have surfaced issues that *Church of the Saviour* needs to speak into regarding biblical justice. Our hope is to provide clarity in Christian deportment and engagement. Or to put it another way, *how* and *what/why* we should engage as Bible-believing Christians.

## 1. DEPORTMENT – HOW WE SHOULD BEHAVE: LISTENING, LOVING AND LEARNING

### a. Our understanding of and relationship to the sovereign God must be in focus<sup>3</sup>

- The chief end of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
- Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.
- God created humanity in his own image.
- Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.
- You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.
- What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

### b. Forming our beliefs<sup>4</sup>

- The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
- But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in

<sup>1</sup> The Apostle Paul in Romans 12:17-21

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis in ***The Weight of Glory*** pp. 161-162

<sup>3</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism, first question; Revelation 4:11; Genesis 1:27; I John 4:8; Deuteronomy 6:5; Micah 6:8

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 9:10; James 3:17; I Corinthians 1:27; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Romans 12:2

peace by those who make peace.

- But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.
- We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ
- Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

### **c. Sharing our beliefs<sup>5</sup>**

- Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.
- Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.
- Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.
- We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.
- Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.
- Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, rather in humility regard others as more important than yourselves.
- And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

## **2. ENGAGEMENT – WHAT WE SHOULD ENGAGE AND WHY**

If [we] profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, [we are] not confessing Christ, however boldly [we] may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the [follower] is proved and... is mere flight and disgrace [to flinch] at that point.<sup>6</sup>

As a Christian community, we look to God's Word for clarity on the concept and principles of biblical justice. The foundation of biblical justice rests on the fact that all are created in God's image. In Him there is no favoritism: Each person has equal value in God's eyes. Principles of justice in society are outlined in both the Old and New Testaments. Biblical justice addresses more than "Thou shalt not..." commands. There are multiple directives to care for, empower, and serve those in need, including orphans, widows, foreigners, the poor, and marginalized. Like God, we are to practice no favoritism (Exodus 23:1-9; James 1:27, 2:1-4, 8-9). Instead, we are called to promote both individual and societal responsibility.

The root of injustice in society is also described in God's Word. The Fall describes our rebellion and resulting sinful state. Love and mutual understanding have given way to a lack of understanding, distrust, and various prejudices. Our selfishness leads to fear, distrust, and contempt of the differences that God has created across humanity. Justice has been corrupted by injustice, impartiality is too often replaced by preferential treatment, and care for the needy is marred by neglect and abuse. Injustice is seen in the failure to defend the oppressed, which exacerbates all

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<sup>5</sup> James 3:1; Romans 14:1; 1 Corinthians 8:9; Romans 15:1; Ephesians 4:32; Philippians 2:3; 1 Corinthians 13:2

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Francis Schaeffer but misattributed to Martin Luther in *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, Crossway Books, pp. 50-51, 1984 – Although Luther said many similar things, it more likely comes from a 19<sup>th</sup> Century novel by Elizabeth Rundle Charles, called *The Chronicles of the Schoenberg Cotta Family* (Thomas Nelson, 1864).

humanity's flight from responsibility rather than fostering biblical peace (shalom<sup>7</sup>) and societal good (tov<sup>8</sup>).

Our God is both just *and* merciful and therefore demands justice and mercy (Micah 6:8). If we want to reach out to the world with God's love, we need to model it within our own community, treating each other with justice and mercy, no matter our socioeconomic, racial, cultural, or gender differences. Only then can we be effective and credible advocates for those who cannot speak for themselves, and for those who suffer from injustice as a result of sinful structures in our society that maintain unequal and unfair treatment (e.g., abortion laws).

As a church, *Church of the Saviour*, is called to work for biblical justice, which requires us to step out of our comfort zone, build bridges, and reach out to people who are different from us. We need to offer help sacrificially where help is needed; whether physical, economic, emotional, or spiritual. We need to unmask injustices created, encouraged, or tolerated by those in power. We need to work alongside the powerless to escape bondage of any kind.

How do we accomplish this? In order to act in true and effective ways, we need to be educated on where the needs are, what principles to follow on the basis of what God teaches us in the Scriptures, and how to work together to be the voice and hands of Christ in our world. Every church is uniquely situated. The *Church of the Saviour* community is, on average, highly educated, has many resources, and is well positioned to exert considerable influence. While there are opportunities everywhere, our primary area of service is right where we are located. Some in our church are already working with issues of injustice regularly; we can indeed learn from them. We are also strategically located near Philadelphia and thus understand God's providence in that.

Areas of involvement to consider include but are not limited to addiction of various kinds, human trafficking, racial relations, homelessness, abortion, and poverty. As we work for biblical justice, we need to be ready to share the gospel—the Good News of Jesus Christ—whenever we have opportunity. Empowered by God's Spirit and through our actions of obedience—speaking out, helping, influencing, and energizing—we can be instruments of redemption in the Redeemer's hands. What's more, Scripture reminds us that in the end, only hearts truly transformed by the gospel will bring lasting change and justice.

We bring peace/shalom and goodness/tov by recognizing the *Prince of Peace* and the *Good Shepherd* must begin His work of transformation in our own hearts and our own church first. And we look forward to that day in the new heavens and new earth, when all people—of every nation, tribe, people and language (Rev 7:9)—will have an equal seat at God's table, where love for God and neighbor will be pure and unhindered by sin.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "In the Bible, **shalom** means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be." Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> **Tov**, the Hebrew word for "good" or "goodness," is by far one of the most popular terms in the Bible. With more than 700 occurrences of the word in Scripture, we could say that our Bible is the Book of Tov. Surely these poetic lines from the prophet Amos reveal the importance of goodness for those who hear God's call: Do what is tov and run from evil so that you may live! Then the LORD God of Heaven's Armies will be your helper, just as you have claimed. Hate evil and love what is tov; turn your courts into true halls of justice (Amos 5:14-15). From the very first page of our Bibles, tov is the Bible's summary term, the "executive virtue," for how God wants us to live. McKnight, Scot and Barringer, Laura McKnight, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Kindle Edition, pp. 86-87

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.covenantseminary.edu/covenant-seminary-statement-biblical-social-justice/> (see first sentence of last paragraph)