

*Vindicate the weak  
and the fatherless;  
do justice to the  
sick and offended.*

Part One:

The Biblical Basis for Justice

*Psalm 82.3, NASB*



## Do We Really Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ?

*Do we really believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ?*

This is not a trick question.

Do we honestly, whole-heartedly believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? At a deep, fundamental level in our heart of hearts, when no one is looking, do we really believe in what Jesus accomplished on the cross, to the point that we have oriented our whole lives around it?

Prior to the coming of Jesus, we as the human race were without a hope in the world. As a result of the sin of one man, Adam, every person in the world was born separated from God and doomed to spend an eternity away from God. Since the fall of humankind, we have tried to earn God's favor to rectify the damage that was caused in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve first turned their hearts away from God. Yet the effects of sin were so great, so massive, that all of the good works in the world weren't able to take away its sting.

*Enter Jesus.*

Romans 5 tells us that in the same way sin entered the world through one man, the free gift of eternal life has been made available through the sacrifice of one man: Jesus Christ. In His death, He took upon Himself the penalty of sin for all of humanity, so that no person would ever have to face the reality of eternal separation from God. After spending three days in hell, He rose from the grave and is now seated at the right hand of God, interceding on our behalf.

*Do we believe this?*

If we do, we must also believe that the purpose of the resurrection isn't one-dimensional, because the effects of sin are not one-dimensional. You see, sin not only affected our relationship with God, it corrupted our relationship with everything in this world! According to Genesis 3, sin has compromised the relationship that we have with one another, the earth, the environment and even animals! However, in Christ, we are in

the process of being reconciled to all of these things, and especially to one another. The power of the cross has destroyed the wall that used to divide us, and has made us one.<sup>1</sup>

*Do we believe this?*

If we do, our belief must also alter the way that we live. Instead of allowing bitterness, discord, jealousy, hate, fear and unforgiving feelings to define our relationships, we have to give way to love in the same way that Christ loved us. Christ loved us while we were still sinners, meaning that we didn't do anything to merit His favor and grace. In that love, He laid His life down.

God may not be asking us to lay our lives down in the same way, but He is asking, rather compelling, us to live sacrificially in a world that desperately needs Him. He is asking us to put aside the baggage that we are carrying around from those who have hurt and wounded us. He is asking us to choose to embrace one another rather than wallow in self-pity and feelings of victimization. He is asking us to surrender preconceived notions and stereotypes that we hold toward each other, and instead see our neighbors, our family, our friends, and even our enemies, the same way that Christ sees them. He is asking for us, as people who claim to follow Him, to model the truth of the Gospel in the way that we treat each other, see each other, and talk about each other. Why? So that those around us will believe in this God who gave up so much just so that we could have eternal life.

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<sup>1</sup> Eph 2.15 – 17

## An Invitation to All

*When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22.14- 20, NASB).*

In this passage, Jesus celebrates the Passover with His disciples. In the Old Testament, the Passover was something that the Israelites celebrated to commemorate God bringing them out of the land of the Egyptians, and more specifically delivering them from slavery.<sup>2</sup> This was a celebration that was specifically for the Israelites because they were the ones God had delivered from Egypt. Although other nations were invited to participate in the subsequent festival, the feast of weeks or Pentecost, the Passover was very exclusive in nature.<sup>3</sup>

However, in this passage in Luke, Jesus institutes a new covenant. He connects the Passover lamb to Himself, saying that His body has been broken and His blood has been spilled not only on their behalf but to atone for the sins of the whole world. Jesus makes this even clearer after His resurrection saying:

*"Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24.46 – 48, NASB)."*

As this scripture illustrates, Jesus did not just die for a select few. He died for all, bringing all persons to the communion table of the Lord so that all could partake, so that all could benefit, and so that all could be

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<sup>2</sup> Ex. 12.1-13

<sup>3</sup> Deut. 16.1-12

saved! Yet, not all come. And this is troublesome, because Jesus has made it possible for all to draw near to Him. His sacrifice on the cross has made it such that when death finally comes to each and every one of us, we won't be swallowed up by eternal death, or hell.

Although it is true that many people do not come to the communion table, or to salvation, because of their own pride, unfaith, or sin, it is also true that many do not draw near because they are prevented from doing so. In the first century church in Corinth, people were not able to access the table of the Lord because of divisions and strife that existed among the believers. Although the situation in Corinth took place 2,000 years ago, it is not unique. If we look at churches all over the world, we see that people, the lost, are prevented from coming to Christ because of division, discord, and exclusion, all committed by those who claim to have partaken of this blessing.

Take for example, the church in South Africa just before the days of apartheid. Apartheid is a form of racial segregation that affected South Africa for decades and its aim was to divide the country into separate states based on race. Undeniably, these actions led to economic disparities in the black parts of the country. Places of the country that white South Africans previously would have never considered taking over were seized and blacks were forced into poor townships with little to no resources. The educational system for people of color during this time period was greatly inferior to that of the white students, and essentially prepared black students and other students of color to do nothing more than serve their white oppressors.<sup>4</sup>

This evil oppression and exploitation was not rooted in the South African secular society, but in the Christian church. At the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1857, leaders decided that white settlers didn't have to partake in communion with the indigenous black people.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wittenberg, Martin. *Decentralization and Local Governance in Developing Countries*. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006

<sup>5</sup> Nelson, John. Web. < <http://newchurchrising.org/2009/10/28/an-unholy-pilgrimage-contending-with-tradition-in-south-africa/>>

Resulting from this decision, South African blacks formed the Dutch Reformed Mission Church for Colored People in 1881. Soon thereafter, the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa was established for Black people, and the Reformed Church in Africa for Indian people.<sup>6</sup> This theology of apartheid naturally began to create a racial caste system that greatly benefitted white people, at the expense of people of color. For decades, people of color were oppressed, impoverished, exploited, beaten, and killed, while whites increased their power and wealth. Unfortunately, many whites failed to see the disconnect between their faith and their actions.

In studying the model of communion as established by Jesus in Luke 22, and practiced in the early church, it is clear that these separationist practices were never God's intent. In fact, Jesus emphasized that the purpose of communion was to draw a united group of believers to God to share in the sacrifice of Christ for their sins.<sup>7</sup> In this sharing, all who trust in Jesus for salvation are invited to participate as in Him "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for...all are one in Christ (Gal 3.28, NASB)" This is important, because if there exists no division of believers in Christ, those divisions have no place in the church or in society at large. However, because the Church allows, and even at times perpetuates these injustices, it is alienating entire classes of people from coming to the table of the Lord, and ultimately to salvation.

Mahatma Gandhi was one person who was alienated from a church and subsequently a relationship with Christ as a result of the church's practices in South Africa. Although he was raised a Hindu, his education provided him with an opportunity to learn about Jesus Christ and the sacrifice that He made on behalf of all of humanity. In 1893, Gandhi left

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<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup> Duncan, David A. "Why Is the Lord's Supper Called Communion?" South Bumby Church of Christ. 2001. Web. 01 Oct. 2011.  
<[http://www.bumby.org/faq/why\\_called\\_communion.html](http://www.bumby.org/faq/why_called_communion.html)>.

India to work for a law firm in South Africa. Upon arriving there, he learned that someone who he wanted to hear was preaching at a church in Durban. At the door, however, he was met with resistance and told that he was in the wrong place because he was Indian. If he wanted to worship God, he was told, he would have to go to a church comprised of his own kind. He left that church disgusted and appalled at the denial of his civil and political liberties. This experience left an impression on Gandhi's heart, causing him to embrace Jesus while questioning the character of those who were supposed to represent Him. <sup>8</sup>

Gandhi's experience is just one example of how exclusionary practices keep people from embracing God. If we had the opportunity to go through the pages of history since the church's inception, it is likely that we would encounter millions of more Gandhi-like scenarios. This means that as a body of believers, we have potentially hindered millions of people from coming into a relationship with God, which ultimately affects how they will spend eternity.

Understanding this reality, we must remind ourselves that our salvation is not unto ourselves. Jesus didn't die just to bring us and those who look like us into a relationship with God. Instead, He compels us all to invite others into that relationship as well. We must constantly check our actions, our attitudes, and our thoughts to make sure that they are ones that invite others to the same table from which we have received, instead of ones that cause them to turn away from it.

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<sup>8</sup> Christianity Today. Mahatma Gandhi and Christianity Retrieved August 3, 2013 from <http://in.christiantoday.com/articledir/print.htm?id=2837>

## Not Fully Human

“A self-righteous religious leader once asked Jesus a question: “*Teacher, what is the great commandment in the law (Mt 22.36)?*” To this, Jesus responds: “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...and love your neighbor as yourself. And the second is like unto it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Mt. 22.37-39, NASB).*”

Love the Lord your God...with everything! The religious teacher undoubtedly knew the intricacies of this command as it was, and continues to be, an essential component of the Jewish faith. But the loving your neighbor as yourself component of the command was unfamiliar and he probably wondered why Jesus saw loving his neighbor as a crucial component of spirituality. The fact of the matter is that all sin stems from one’s inability to hold up either component of this commandment. Let’s take a look at the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 for further clarity:

- \*Have no other gods before God (love God)
- \*Don't worship idols (love God)
- \*Don't take name of the Lord in vain (love God)
- \*Remember the Sabbath (love God)
- \*Honor your parents (love your neighbor)
- \*Don't murder (love your neighbor)
- \*Don't commit adultery (love your neighbor)
- \*Don't steal (love your neighbor)
- \*Don't lie (love your neighbor)
- \*Don't covet your neighbors belongings (love your neighbor)

After reading Exodus 20, we understand how seriously God takes this ‘loving your neighbor as yourself’ component of the law. The question for us is, are we doing this? In all honesty, not many of us do, mostly because we fail to understand who our neighbor is. To take it one step further, not only do we not understand who our neighbor is, but we also fail to see that they could possibly be anything like us. We fail to see our neighbor, the other, as fully human and therefore fully deserving of the same love, respect, and dignity that we bestow upon ourselves.

During the period of slavery in the United States, one idea that circulated was that black people had a different biological makeup than that of white people. In fact, scientists such as Carl von Linnaeus, and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach went so far as to suggest that black people were of a whole different species than whites. As a result of these erroneous claims, whites made a case for the justification of slavery, rape, conquest, theft, discrimination, mass incarceration, exclusion from resources, and murder. This justification was necessary in order for whites, and particularly those who espoused to be Christians, to not have cognitive dissonance over what they were doing.

However, the United States and other Western nations as well, has a long history of marginalizing neighbors all over the world in similar ways. We call people in places like Indonesia, Guatemala, Albania, Mauritania and Iraq our third-world neighbors, which could easily be rephrased as third-class humans. However, we must realize that simply because a country is not developed doesn't mean that the people who come from that country are somehow less valuable or human than we are. Just because a country does not possess the infrastructure, technology, government, or economy that America and other Western nation possess does not mean that they should be labeled a third-world nation. But this labeling gives other nations such as the United States the permission to exploit their land and oppress their people. And yet, our government and those who run it has the audacity to prohibit those same people from immigrating to Western nations, so that they can somehow make a living to provide for their families after our foreign policy has robbed them of their wealth, land, and livelihood. We justify ignoring their need for food, water, safety, and life, and pat ourselves on the back anytime we throw a dollar their way because 'we made a difference.' We feel justified, because we have made them less than our neighbor and we do not see them in the same light as we see ourselves.

Unfortunately, we hold similar feelings toward the unborn. When does life begin? Fertilization? Conception? Four weeks? Twenty weeks? Forty weeks? Delivery? Our answer to this question gives us permission to treat the unborn in a certain way. Because if life does not begin until one is born, the idea of humanness does not either. And if the unborn isn't really human, then it is okay to treat them and dispose of them as we see

fit.

Even though many, if not all of us, fail to live up to God's commandment to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, the good news is that we can change that. Because the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells inside of us, and He has provided the perfect example of what love looks like, we are able to love our neighbors wholly and completely. But how do we do this? According to C.S. Lewis, it all boils down to the actions that we display toward others:

*“The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor, act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less.”<sup>9</sup>*

As Lewis suggests, our actions actually set the stage for how we feel about our neighbors. If we go about taking property, opportunity and life from others, we can by no means expect to find ourselves loving them. In fact, when we do these things and try to cover them up so as to put others in our debt for doing a seemingly good deed, we still won't find ourselves being more loving. However, if we go out of our way to provide for others, we will soon discover that we love them.

So let's commit ourselves to loving our neighbors – all of our neighbors. Let's stop making qualifiers of who belongs and who does not belong to the human race based on race, age, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status, because we all belong. Our only task is to learn how to get along.

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<sup>9</sup> Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. HarperCollins 2001 ed. 52. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1952. 151. Print.



## Reclaiming Very Goodness

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light. God saw that the light was good and God separated that light from darkness...and there was evening and there was morning, one day.*

*Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters. God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so...and there was evening and there was morning, a second day.*

*Then God said, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear;" and it was so...and God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their own kind with seed in them;" and it was so...and God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a third day.(Gen. 1.1-13, NASB)*

For three more days this creation pattern as recorded in Genesis continued. God went on to create light, seasons, days, and years. He created waters full of living creatures, and birds to fly in the air. And He created cattle, and creatures of every kind, and He called each and every one of these things good. Yet, on the sixth day, the day that God created human beings, the pattern slightly changed when God gave humanity a distinction that wasn't given to anything else. Unlike everything else that God created, humans were not only created to be good but very good.

So that is what humanity represented. Perfection. Completion. Very goodness. And in that state we enjoyed a perfect relationship with God. We talked with Him freely, uninhabited and unashamed because there was not anything that suggested that we should ever hide ourselves from Him. But we also enjoyed a fulfilling relationship with one another. We were not afraid of someone else's inadequacies, shortcomings,

background, gender, or ethnicity because we were first and foremost complete in God. We were able to be our real, authentic selves with one another, to the point that Adam and Eve were naked before one another and God, and felt absolutely no shame.

Yet something happened that smeared our perfection and corrupted our goodness. We fell out of relationship with God. We believed a lie, that we could somehow achieve God-ness if we were to do the very thing that God instructed us not to do. In Genesis 2, God clearly told Adam that he was not to eat from the tree of forbidden fruit or he would die. But Adam and Eve ate the fruit anyway, believing that in doing so they would attain a wisdom that they had not previously known. And although they attained it, it was not what they had in mind.

As a result of the fruit, Adam and Eve learned what it was to live and be in sin. They understood what it was to be far away from God, to the point that they hid themselves from Him because they knew that He would be disappointed. And they knew what it was like to be far from one another, and to be ashamed of one another as well as of themselves. What else could make a husband and wife feel the need to cover and veil the most intimate parts of who they were?

Not only did Adam and Eve cover their body parts, they covered their hearts. They knew that there was something wrong, and the best way to address it was for each of them to blame someone else. First, Adam blamed Eve for making him eat the fruit. Subsequently, Eve blamed the serpent that deceived her. Neither one took responsibility for their own actions or shortcomings. Yet both of them, and all of humanity with them, lost out on what it meant to be good and complete.

Immediately after this episode, we come upon Genesis 4 where we witness the first murder. Cain, feeling inadequate and ashamed because of his own shortcomings, lashed out at Abel and killed him even though he had nothing to do with Cain's inability to measure up. Abel just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and was a clear

representation of all that Cain was not. This did not happen between two people who were from two different mothers, or even two different nationalities. Cain and Abel were brothers.

In Genesis 9, we encounter Noah. Noah was a righteous man who God spared from the flood, along with his family. After the flood, Noah embraced farming as his livelihood and planted a vineyard. With a vineyard at his disposal, Noah got drunk and naked, and his son Ham ended up seeing this. Rather than admit his failure for getting inebriated in the first place, Noah took his frustration out on Ham, his own son, and Canaan, his grandson, saying that their families would be in perpetual servitude.

Then we come upon Genesis 16, which tells the story of Sarai and Hagar. Abram (later Abraham) and Sarai (later Sarah) had been trying to get pregnant for years, believing that God would make good on His promise and give them a child. After seeing no sign of a son, and only old age, Sarai suggested that Abram sleep with her handmaid Hagar to bear a son through her. Yet, when it worked, Sarai took it out on Hagar. She blamed Hagar for her troubles, forgetting Hagar had nothing to do with her barrenness and inability to conceive a child. But Hagar was an easy target, and so the blame, the hatred, and the oppression continued until one day, God removed both Hagar and her son Ishmael from the oppressive environment.

And we have only covered the first 16 chapters of the biblical text. Yet if we continue, we will find that this pattern of blame, hatred, oppression, exploitation, murder, and shame persists. The Bible clearly illustrates that wherever two people exist, at least one of them will find a way to divide and conquer the other simply because as humans we believe that the existence of others threatens that of our own. In his article *From Sin to Radical Evil*, Ted Peters explains that tendency to divide and conquer all starts with anxiety:

*“Each of us is anxious, regardless of how much we are aware of it. Here anxiety refers to our pre-conscious awareness of our impending death. At some level, we are aware that we live in a tension between life and death, between being and non-being... We falsely believe that we can conquer our anxiety through gaining power to insure our space and time. The result is that we steal space and time from others in order to prop up what will eventually be revealed as a tragic delusion.”<sup>10</sup>*

But we must remember that we did not start this way. We started off being very good. We started off being complete and perfect and whole in God. How do we get back there? We cannot continue going around pitting ourselves against others because of our own deep-seeded insecurities. We cannot keep blaming the Democrats, Republicans, blacks, whites, women, men, Muslims, homosexuals, Christians, Jews, rich, poor, or anybody else for the way that we feel about ourselves. Instead we need to claim the responsibility that Adam and Eve cast off and own up to our deep-rooted issues.

This work starts at the Cross of Christ. If the root of our problems has to do with us not being in proper relationship with God, then it is at the Cross where we have to start our work to reclaim our very goodness. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a way was made for us to enter back into creation with God. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5 calls this a new creation, in that all of the mess, shame, and sin that we were accustomed to has passed away and we have become completely new.

Out of this renewed relationship with God, we are able to begin to deal with our inadequacies and become who we were always meant to be. It does not happen overnight, but as we consciously and consistently meditate on the Word of God, we begin to change. We begin to feel so

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<sup>10</sup> Peters, Ted. "From Sin to Radical Evil." N.p., 10 Dec. 2005. Web. July-Aug. 2012. <[http://www.plts.edu/docs/ite\\_sin.pdf](http://www.plts.edu/docs/ite_sin.pdf)>.

complete, so full in Christ that there is no longer any need to dump all over someone else. We begin to become whole and functioning human beings, so we no longer feel the need to divide, conquer, and oppress others just because they threaten who we are. In fact, we are no longer threatened!

There are systems in our world, such as racism, classism, and sexism that keep powerful people in power and that reinforce the stereotypes of the poor colored masses so that they stay out of power. Yet this is only a symptom of a much larger problem. The real problem is a human problem, centering on who we are as individuals. It is only until we are willing to do work around that, and reclaim the goodness that we lost in the beginning, that social justice even has a chance.



## How Then Shall We Stand?

*“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers” (Ps. 1.1-3, NASB).*

Many people are familiar with this popular quote: “If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything.” But according to the psalmist, it's not just about standing for something; it's about standing for the right things, namely the things that reflect God's character and commands. So the question is, what exactly are those things? Although many examples abound in the Bible, there are three that seem to polarize the people of God in our society today: justice, righteousness, and mercy.

### Justice

God deeply cares about those who are suffering in our midst and as we read the Bible, it is clear that He wants us to do something about it. According to Deuteronomy 15 and 16, we are to pursue justice, ensuring that we treat the most vulnerable populations in our society--the widow, the orphan, and the sojourner--with the dignity and respect that they deserve. One way that we can follow the Lord's command here is by speaking up on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves.

Consider these texts:

*“Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy” (Prov 31.8-9, NASB).*

*“You shall not pervert the justice due to your needy brother in his dispute. Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty”(Exodus 23.6-7, NASB).*

Jesus' teachings also show us that one of the easiest ways to administer justice is by providing for those who are in need. Matthew 25.34-40 confirms this:

*Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the*

*world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'*

If we were to take the time to go through the whole biblical text, we would continue to discover this theme of justice surfacing repeatedly. However, the truth about justice often gets clouded by the partisan politics of our day. In the United States we seem to find our identity in our political persuasion over and above our identity in Christ. In fact, we often define our faith by our politics rather than allowing our faith to inform our politics when it comes to issues such as poverty, healthcare, hunger and more. Although the Bible instructs us to provide for the least of these, we keep telling ourselves that God helps those who help themselves, which has no biblical basis whatsoever but aligns perfectly with political ideas based on the notion of rugged individualism.

Fortunately, the God that we serve does not dole out justice based on political ideologies. The God that we serve is a God of mercy and compassion, and He calls us to possess the same characteristics in ourselves. He admonishes us to look after the poor, the widow, the orphan and the alien otherwise known as immigrant in our land. No, the Word does not say anything specific about health care, but it has a lot to say about how we should treat and care for the poor and the suffering.

People in this country and in this world are suffering and dying due to injustice, poverty, oppression, and exploitation. Are we standing for them? Are we standing for justice? Are we standing for the end of hunger and poverty? Are we standing for the end of racism, classism, and sexism? Or are we staying silent because the political party we align ourselves with wants nothing to do with these things?

We must come to realize that regardless of our politics, justice is a central theme of the Word of God. When we stand on biblical, godly principles, we find ourselves standing on principles that call for us to be

concerned for the least of these. No matter how we twist it, God is a God of justice, who stands in solidarity with those who we would so often like to forget exist. Are we standing with Him, or are we standing in the path of sinners against Him?

## **Righteousness**

In addition to taking a stand for justice, as a people of God we are called to stand for righteousness, which is also referred to as holiness. This is an essential component of who we are as believers, simply because God is holy and He admonishes us to be like Him. For many people, this truth may be a hard pill to swallow. Yet, it is required for people who fear and walk with the Lord, so swallow we must!

Holiness and righteousness are widely unpopular in a culture that seems to accept everything from everybody. But we must remember that God has not called us to popularity. In fact He has called us to peculiarity in order to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (I Pet. 2.9, NASB). Do we understand what the Apostle Peter is saying here? Our righteousness is a reflection of who God is and what He has done in our lives. Therefore, our lives are not really about us at all. Rather, they are about the glory of His name and the furtherance of the Gospel.

Sexual immorality is one of the most potent forms of unrighteousness--and one that is destroying us! Our lives, and television screens for that matter, are filled with images, thoughts, and ideas about sex, and not in the way that God intended. God created us as sexual beings, in fact it is very central to who we are as humans. But we have exploited this, perverted it, and are deceiving ourselves about its consequences.

While it is not politically correct to address sexual sin, God has not called us to be politically correct. He has called us to be holy in all manners of righteousness! And sometimes that causes a fair amount of discomfort, especially when you are dealing with the issue of homosexuality. There are many people in our lives who identify as LGBTQ and I honestly believe that many of us want to be accepting, loving, and respectful of their decisions. But how do we do this while still standing for righteousness?

Many churches have not done a good job handling this issue. Many churches either push people away with their condemnation, or they

reinterpret the biblical text so that homosexuality is no longer considered a sin. Yet neither approach represents the truth of God's Word. But Jesus' response in John 8 is:

“Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and *began* to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center *of the court*, they \*said to Him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?” They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him *be the* first to throw a stone at her.” Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they *began* to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center *of the court*. Straightening up, Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more’” (Jn 8.1-10, NASB).

What we see Jesus doing in this passage is offering grace to the woman caught in adultery while also addressing her sin. As a result of His love for her, He accepted her just as she was and so He refused to judge her in the same way that the Pharisees has done. Yet it was also His love for her that called the sin out and challenged her to change.

What would happen if we, as the people of God, modeled this same behavior before not only the LGBTQ community but others trapped in sexual immorality? Though it would take some hard work, I believe that things would change. Besides what do we have to lose; what we are doing now is simply not working. Marriages continue to break apart as a result of adultery. Pornography has taken a strong root in the church, affecting laity and ministers alike. People do not waiting until they get married before they have sex, and sometimes end up with multiple partners before finding the right one. These behaviors come with

additional consequences that destroy communities not only in the United States but across the globe. God has something better for us than this!

## **Mercy**

Sometime ago, I listened to a wonderful *Focus on the Family* broadcast. Tim Goeglein, former White House staffer and author of the book *The Man in the Middle*, shared his experience serving with former President Bush, which ended when colleagues discovered that he had plagiarized some of his work. Humiliated, he wanted nothing more than to simply bow out gracefully, leave without being noticed, and save what could be left of his fleeting dignity.<sup>11</sup>

On the day of his departure, President Bush called him into his office. Goeglein fully expected to be chastised, and for good reason, for what he did had jeopardized the administration. Goeglein opened his mouth to apologize for his wrongdoing and was silenced by these words: “Tim, I forgive you.” Though surprised, Goeglein tried once again to make amends for his indiscretions. And once again he was silenced by the president's remarks: “I have known grace and mercy in my life, and I am extending it to you. Tim, I forgive you.”<sup>12</sup>

Forgiveness. Mercy. They almost seem like foreign concepts in a world that is often unforgiving and unloving. As a people, we tend to have such a hard time forgiving others for what they have done, whether or not it affects us directly. We don't forgive those who have cheated us or done us harm, but we also don't forgive those who stumble into sin—especially if said sin is exposed in public. In both instances, we believe that the person accused of wrongdoing should receive the strictest form of punishment and under no circumstances should ever receive mercy or forgiveness.

The elder brother in the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 serves as a great example for us. The Prodigal Son sought after his father's wealth while he was still living. Although he was the younger son, he was due a portion of his father's inheritance, but he wanted it now. Which basically

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.focusonthefamily.com/popups/media\\_player.aspx?MediaId=%7B3EC54D23-A982-4B07-A438-24347B4882BB%7D](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/popups/media_player.aspx?MediaId=%7B3EC54D23-A982-4B07-A438-24347B4882BB%7D)

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

meant that he wanted his father dead. Even so, the father gave him his inheritance and the son went away and blew it all. After all his wealth was gone, and he found himself in hunger and poverty, he decided to go back to the father, repent and ask for forgiveness. Not only did the father forgive him, he threw a huge feast in his honor, celebrating that his son had come home.

The elder son was furious over his father's actions. How could he just forgive this impetuous son and act like he had done nothing wrong? How could the father throw the younger son a party when he had never done the same for the elder son in all of his righteousness? But hear the father's response:

*“Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found”*<sup>13</sup>(Luke 15.31, 32 NASB).

The real tragedy of this story isn't that the elder son was unforgiving. The real tragedy is that he did not realize how much he, too, had been a recipient of his father's forgiveness and mercy. In all of his pride and self-righteousness, his father had also shown him kindness and favor. His reaction to his younger brother is not only inappropriate, but also hypocritical, in that he was in need of the same grace that he envied his brother for receiving.

The Bible tells us this: *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you”*(Ephesians 4.32, NIV).

God has forgiven each and every one of us for so much. Although we will never understand the gravity of our sin, we know assuredly that while we were still wrapped up in our sin and in our depraved minds, Christ died for us. This granted us immediate forgiveness and

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connection with the God that we willingly denied and walked away from. If God, in all of His righteousness and holiness, can forgive a people who have completely blown it, how much more should you and I forgive one another?

We must forgive because we have been forgiven. We must walk and stand for mercy, because we have been shown mercy. We must cast aside bitterness, resentment, and the right to avenge, because we understand that we really don't have this right at all. We must give up the right to hold a grudge, and instead allow God to be God and deal with it on His own terms. And perhaps in doing so, the person on the other end of our forgiveness might just be transformed as they look at us and see the very likeness of God.

Justice. Righteousness. Mercy. Three themes that flow throughout the Bible, three themes in which we can stand. Of course, other themes and truths abound such as love, endurance, peace, and faithfulness, to name just a few. But the themes of justice, righteousness, and mercy show how we can choose to stand for the things of God, in a culture that begs us to do otherwise.



**Scripture Passage:**

Read I Corinthians 12.12 – 26.

**Reflection Questions:**

1. How have you experienced or participated in actions to exclude those who are different than you from church? If you experienced the rejection, think about how did this make you feel? If you participated in excluding others, what circumstances led you to do so? What do you think you can do differently in the future to ensure that your actions don't push people away but draw them in?
2. How did reading the essay "Not Fully Human" cause you to think about your ideas of who belongs and doesn't belong?
3. How do you think the mission of the church is intrinsically tied to the pursuit of social justice?
4. Why do you think it is easier for many churches to take a stand for issues like homosexuality and abortion over pressing social justice issues of our day?

**Prayer:**

Dear God, we are truly a broken people. For years, we have participated in actions that have marginalized and oppressed people, not only in the United States but around the globe. Our blatant disregard towards people who are not like us has led to many of them rejecting you. Forgive us as we pursue justice and reconciliation with those we have pushed aside.