



**JUSTICE FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE: HOW CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
CAN TRANSFORM A BROKEN AND HURTING WORLD**

By: Hope Wilson, MA, MSW

**Presented at:
NACSW Convention 2016
November, 2016
Cincinnati, OH**

SALVATION ARMY NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

**JUSTICE FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE: HOW CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY CAN TRANSFORM
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JUSTICE AND FAITH

By Hope Wilson, MA, MSW

11/1/2016

ABSTRACT

Every religion has its own fundamental principles that act as the building blocks of its doctrine and aspirations. These axioms are the glue that holds the belief system in place. When a religion loses its elemental principles, when it cannot tell the difference between what *ought* to be and *what ought not to be*, we can safely declare religion to have lost its objective reason for existence. This paper will provide a foundation for thinking about justice from a Biblical worldview. Although there are many worldviews, only God has a monopoly on faith and justice for the Christian; He defines justice and his righteous character sets its parameters and reveals to us why and how we should operate. Therefore, in order for Christians to live out a justice-driven theology, we must understand what justice actually is, and in order to understand what justice is, we must consider it from the perspective of the One who inscribed its very meaning. Accordingly, this paper will seek to highlight the significance of why Christians need to ground their pursuit of justice in the unique narrative of the Christian Story: Creation, The Fall and Redemption.

Keywords: Justice, Worldview, Imago Dei, Theodicy, Creation, The Fall, Redemption

INTRODUCTION

We are constantly bludgeoned with news about devastating natural disasters and “random” terrorist attacks. Boko Haram, Isis, Al Shabaab and the refugee crisis punctuate our daily newsfeed. The 7.8 earthquake that hit Nepal in 2015 and caused over eight thousand deaths, the 2015 shooting in Charleston, South Carolina that claimed nine innocent lives, Malaysian Airline flight 370 that was lost with all on board two years ago, recurrent wildfires in California, the recent attacks in Paris, police brutality against unarmed black men and boys, the killing of police officers in line of duty in Baton Rouge, the 2016 Orlando shooting that killed 49 individuals, the list goes on. Life now can be encapsulated with the following: *hash-tag# Pray for the victims of...* And who can forget this shocking image? (**Alan** three year old, Kurdi that perished along with his five-year-old brother and mother off the coast of Turkey.)



When you hear or see such tragedies, people often ask, *where is God?* Or specifically, *where is justice?* Where should people turn to when disaster hits? How should Christians respond? What ideas should inform our understanding of pain and suffering in the world? What is the rationale to act and pursue justice? What is justice anyway?

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the necessity of grounding our thinking about faith and justice in a Biblical worldview that affirms the theological understanding of God, The Fall and Redemption. As Christians it is critical that our actions reflect what we hold to be true

about God. Is God just? Is God good? Is God powerful? Is God in control of all things? Does He care about human suffering? Is He the answer to all suffering? If so, how do we communicate this to the world? How do we view reality and how should we respond to it? We will examine how **worldviews** influence our thinking and impact our decisions. Exploring the concept of worldviews should lead us to critically analyze and ensure that “we live and move and have our being in accordance with the worldview we really hold, not the one we merely confess.”¹ A worldview, like a GPS, is what helps us locate where we are and where we are going.

Worldview is defined as:

“A commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart,² that can be expressed as a story³ or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundations on which we live and move and have our being.”⁴

In brief, a worldview is composed of the core ideas that inform our perception of reality, values, identity and purpose in life. Worldviews shape our understanding of theology, philosophy, ethics, psychology, sociology, law, politics, economics and history. These major categories form the rules and patterns of our thinking and ultimately our actions. There are many competing worldviews offering answers to the fundamental questions about life⁵:

1. Origin: Where do we come from?
2. Meaning: What is the purpose of our lives?

¹ Sire p280, 2016

² According to David Naugle the heart “is the central defining element of the human person. It is the door to wisdom (Prov.2:10); it governs our emotions (Ex 4:14), desires and will (1Chron 29:18), spirituality (Acts 8:21), and the intellect (Rom 1:21).

³ Christians do have a story, however, The Bible is the narrative of God’s creative and redemptive work in the world; thus it also contains the story of the Christian community. It is God’s story about what God is doing. This Christian story was received; we did not make it up. It is not our story about God. Nor is it the sum of our individual stories, even though God holds these stories in high regard. It is this story of what God wants and is doing that compels us to care for the poor and to work for human transformation. God’s story is the source of our motivation, our vision, and our values of mission.” (Myers p23, 2009)

⁴ Sire p20. 2016

⁵ <http://rzim.org/just-a-thought-broadcasts/four-fundamental-questions/>

3. Morality: How do we determine what is right or wrong?
4. Destiny: What happens when we die?

Here are the tenets of various worldviews which may influence our thinking:

	SECULARISM	MARXISM	POSTMODERNISM	NEW SPIRITUALITY	ISLAM	CHRISTIANITY
THEOLOGY	Atheism	Atheism	Theological suspicion	Pantheism	Monotheism	Trinitarian monotheism
PHILOSOPHY	Materialism & naturalism	Dialectical materialism	Anti-realism	Spiritual monism	Dualism	Dualism
ETHICS	Moral relativism or utilitarianism	Proletariat morality	Cultural relativism	Karma	Divine command theory	Agape
BIOLGY	New-Darwinism	Punctuated equilibrium	Anti-essentialism	Spiritual evolution	Special creation	Special creation
PSYCHOLOGY	Mind/body monism (self-actualization)	Mind/body monism (classical conditioning)	Decentered self	Mind/body monism (Fourth Force)	Mind/body dualism (unfallen)	Mind/body dualism (fallen)
SOCIOLOGY	Personal autonomy	Proletariat society	Social constructionism	Collective consciousness	Ummah	Sphere sovereignty
LAW	Legal positivism	Proletariat law	Critical legal studies	Self-law	Shariah law	Natural law
POLITICS	Progressivism	Statism	Political pessimism or liberalism	Autarchy	Islamic theocracy	Subsidiarity
ECONOMICS	Economic interventionism	Socialism	Economic interventionism	Universal enlightened production	Shariah economics	Biblical stewardship
HISTORY	Social progress	Historical materialism	Historical revisionism	Evolutionary godhood	Pan-Islam	Redemptive narrative

6

⁶ The table was taken from Myers and Noebel's book, 2016

In this paper we will consider justice from the lens of two worldviews: the Christian/Biblical worldview and the secular humanist worldview. First, to compare and contrast the fundamentals of these two worldviews:

	CHRISTIANITY	SECULAR HUMANISM
	Bible	Humanist Manifestos I, II, III
THEOLOGY	Theism (Trinitarian)	Atheism
PHILOSOPHY	Supernaturalism (faith and reason)	Naturalism
ETHICS	Moral absolutes	Moral relativism
BIOLGY	Creationism	Neo-Darwinian evolution
PSCHOLOGY	Mind/body dualism (fallen)	Monism (self-actualization)
SOCIOLOGY	Traditional family, church, state	Non-traditional family, church, state
LAW	Divine/natural law	Positive law
POLITICS	Justice, freedom, order	Liberalism (secular world government)
ECONOMICS	Stewardship of property	Interventionism
HISTORY	Creation, fall, redemption	Historical evolution

⁷ The table was taken from Myers and Noebel's book Revised 2nd Edition, 2006

To be sure, there are other worldviews such as Marxism, Postmodernism, New Spirituality and Islam to name a few. We are considering these two views because they wield great influence on our view of justice. As opposite as these worldviews are, they have some similarities. They both emphasize the uniqueness and dignity of human beings, which takes center stage in the discussion of justice. For example, secular humanists believe in treating all people fairly and equally and so do Christians. Similarly, secular humanists also believe in the dignity and worth of mankind. Despite their similarities, we must be very careful in comparing these two ideologically opposed worldviews. Secular humanism has sexy curb appeal. On the surface level, it is attractive because its core is about placing human beings at the center of all things and dealing with science, the “facts.” That is, if you cannot see it, touch it, feel it, or prove it, then it does not exist and is therefore not a credible theory. Human experience, reason and logic are the authority on which secular humanism thrives, as described in the Humanist Manifesto II:

*We believe, however, that traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species. Any account of nature should pass the tests of scientific evidence; in our judgment, the dogmas and myths of traditional religions do not do so.*⁸

The secular humanism ethos, in a nutshell, is based on local, empirical knowledge, limited only to what man can prove.

A Biblical worldview, on the other hand, sees humanity both as rational and emotional beings. Man is not part of nature nor does the world self-exist; in fact, the Bible paints the world not as a blank canvas as secular humanists would want us to believe, waiting for a master artist (us) to come and paint a masterpiece. (We will explore this later in more depth). The Christian doctrine teaches that the world has a beginning, a Creator and a purpose and it includes pain and suffering. Human beings are not at the center, and empirical knowledge alone is not sufficient to respond to or satisfy human needs. While science can tell us the composition of human beings, it cannot quantify their God-given worth. Human beings have intrinsic value that stems from sharing a likeness with their creator—from being *made* in the image of their creator (“Imago Dei”)—not a likeness of each other. The purpose of our existence, including an explanation of

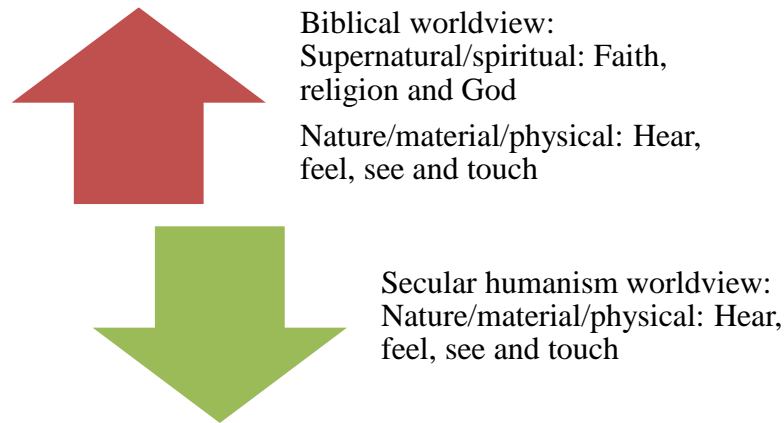
⁸ Humanist Manifesto II http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_ii

suffering and pain, is not left to speculative interpretation but to the creator, God. Therefore our understanding of faith and justice must be rooted in what God says about creation, the fall and redemption not limited to science (seen as the apex of human genius) or nature (which views matter as the prime reality).

Two of the major defining differences, among others, between the Christian worldview and secular humanist worldview are the separation between the physical and the spiritual and the lack of an eternal perspective. Secular humanists eschew any language that gives credence to anything beyond the physical or material. For them, the end for mankind is annihilation. However, the Christian worldview teaches that there is an incontrovertible link between the physical and the spiritual. In addition, Christian doctrine affirms an afterlife.⁹ Hence, to have a balanced view of reality one needs lenses that apprehend the physical and the spiritual, and the eternal landscape. Only the Christian worldview offers the lenses that provide a comprehensive, holistic view: “The Biblical worldview is holistic in the sense that the physical is never understood as being disconnected or separate from the spiritual world and rule of the God who created it.”¹⁰ The image below shows how the two worldviews perceive the world:

⁹ “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ (Luke 16:19-26)

¹⁰ Myers p8, 2009



For the Christian, pursuing justice in this world must always include remembering that the physical world cannot be understood without the spiritual and a view of eternity. Separating or ignoring the impact the spiritual has on the physical world "...makes it hard to understand the impact of sin in the material world of economics, politics, culture, and the church as an institution, and even harder to believe that God's salvific and redemptive work extends to this messy, sinful world."¹¹ In summary, a fair assessment of evil and the solution to evil cannot be divorced from the spiritual and the eternal perspective.

WHAT IS JUSTICE?

*"You never know a line is crooked unless you have a straight one to put next to it."*¹²

We can advance justice in the world only by learning about the One whose attribute is justice. He alone can render true justice. The Bible says, "Many seek the face of a ruler, but it is from the Lord that a man gets justice."¹³ The notion of justice in the Bible is varied, especially according to context. The gamut ranges from just weights (Leviticus 19:35-36), offerings (Proverbs 21:3), behaviors (Ezekiel 18:5-9) and institutions (Isaiah 10:1-2). The common thread is that there is a recognized code of ethics/conduct. In essence, there is a shared understanding of certain moral principles that should govern our behavior and relationships (vertically) with God and (horizontally) with one another. Justice in the Bible means:

¹¹ Myers p10, 2009

¹² Socrates

¹³ Proverbs 29:26

- Rendering impartial or fair judgments (Exodus 23:2,6)
- Meting out, or granting, punishment for wrongdoing (Proverbs 11:21)
- Defending the poor/vulnerable populations (Psalms 140:12)

To understand, practice and see moral justice prevail in the world, we must begin with God's right to justice. All men fall short of God's standard of righteousness. Right from the beginning of creation, man forsook God's authority. We were therefore deserving of His wrath, and justice required that we pay the price for our sin. Yet, at the cross, God punished an innocent man in our place in order to meet the requirement of justice for our sinfulness. Long before Boko Haram and Isis claimed innocent lives, and long before Tamil Rice or Brandon Teena's murders, another Man, who was truly pure and blameless, was brutally murdered amidst a cheering crowd. However, as shocking as Jesus' death was, Isaiah 53:10 tells us "Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer..." *Why?* So that sinners could be justified and made righteous before a just and righteous God. As the Bible says, "The Lord *loves* righteousness and *justice*; the earth is full of his unfailing love."¹⁴ If God loves righteousness as this verse declares, then it follows that He delights in acting justly even when it means sacrificing his only Son.

Justice and righteousness in the Bible are mutually reinforcing. There cannot be justice where there is unrighteousness, and righteousness cannot exist where there is injustice. God is righteous and hates sin, therefore He must punish law-breakers. We all deserve his wrath and punishment due to our rebellion.¹⁵ Justice demands that we must pay a penalty for our disobedience.¹⁶ For God to be just He must punish the wicked and those committing injustices, or else He cannot claim to be just. All the beautiful attributes we love to cite are connected to God being just. God cannot love unconditionally unless He is just, He cannot show you mercy unless He is just, He cannot be kind and compassionate unless he is first and foremost just. ***Thus justice is judgment according to God's righteous laws.***

If God simply lets us (sinners) go unpunished, then God could hardly be called loving, compassionate, kind merciful or just. Imagine a judge who releases violent criminals, rapists, or murderers just because he is loving or kind. We would be outraged to see the guilty go

¹⁴ Psalm 33:5

¹⁵ "who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." (Romans 4:25)

¹⁶ The Bible says: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right" (Genesis 19:25)

unpunished and we would feel justice had not been served. Similarly, we would have no “moral” ground to talk about justice if God allowed us to go free without paying any penalty for our sins. In addition, we would not even have a sense of justice. At the cross God demonstrates his love for humanity, “... in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”¹⁷ Christ became our righteousness and we became His sin (1 Corinthians 5:21).

What does Jesus’ death teach us about Justice? The simple answer is that without the cross there is no justice. We would also find it difficult to believe or trust God without the cross. Wright argues:

*The story of Gethsemane and of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth present themselves in the New Testament as the strange, dark conclusion to the story of what God does about evil, of what happens to God’s justice when it takes human flesh, when it gets its feet muddy in the garden and its hands bloody on the cross.*¹⁸

St Augustine effectively encapsulates what Jesus did for us here:

*The Word of the Father,
by Whom all time was created,
was made flesh and was born in time for us.
He, without whose divine permission no day completes its course,
wished to have one day set aside for His human birth.
In the bosom of His Father,
He existed before all the cycles of ages;
born of an earthly mother,
He entered upon the course of the years on this day.
The Maker of man became Man that He,*

¹⁷ Romans 5:8

¹⁸ Wright p74, 2006

Ruler of the stars,
might be nourished at His mother's breast;
that He, the Bread, might hunger;
that He, the Fountain, might thirst;
that He, the Light, might sleep;
that He, the Way, might be wearied by the journey;
that He, the Truth, might be accused by false witnesses;
that He, the Judge of the living and the dead, might be brought to trial by a mortal judge;
that He, Justice, might be condemned by the unjust;
that He, Discipline, might be scourged with whips;
that He, the Foundation, might be suspended upon a cross;
that Courage might be weakened;
that Healer might be wounded; that Life might die.
To endure these and similar indignities for us,
to free us, unworthy creatures,
He who existed as the Son of God before all ages,
without a beginning, deigned to become the Son of Man in these recent years.
He did this although He who submitted to such great evils for our sake had done no evil and
although we,
who were the recipients of so much good at His hands,
had done nothing to merit these benefits.¹⁹

At the cross, justice is displayed as the reconciling act of God to man. As Jesus bore the punishment and wrath of God, the door to mercy was flung open to us. Wright declares, "The cross is the place where, and the means by which, God loved us to the uttermost."²⁰ In essence,

¹⁹ Augustine of Hippo, Sermons 184-229: Sermons on Liturgical Seasons

²⁰ Wright p97, 2006

justice is the apex, the very consummation, of God's love. When suffering and pain tries to veil His lovely face, we look to the cross and there we are reminded of God's immense love. This is the hope Christians offer to those suffering injustices: Christ was despised, rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; He bore our grief, carried our sorrows; he was pierced for our transgressions and he was crushed for our iniquities.²¹ He weeps with those who weep.

God did all this for us because He created us in his image. That is what makes us special. Our right to justice is grounded in our being created in the image of God, the "Imago Dei." Without the image that we share with our Creator, we are reduced to nothing and are no better than a mere machine or animal. We have no human dignity or human rights, because both of these come from—rather, are *created by*—God himself. These rights are conferred by God (not the state) to man regardless of race, social or economic class. These rights derive from man's worth as an image bearer and not from any universal agreement or contract. When Christians answer the call to pursue justice they do so:

- As a demonstration of their faith and the working out of that faith²²
- In the context of the redemption story, the Gospel. "The Gospel tells the story of how the evil in the world—political, social, personal, moral, emotional—reached its height, and how God's long term plan... finally came to its climax."²³
- As witness of God's divine purpose.
- As a declaration that human beings have objective value embedded in who they are and God determines that value.

A SECULAR HUMANISM WOLDVIEW

As in 1933, humanists still believe that traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to live and care for persons, to hear and understand their prayers, and to be able to do something about them, is an unproved and outmoded faith. Salvationism, based on mere

²¹ Isaiah 51:3-5

²² "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (James 2:14-18)

²³ Wright p79, 2006

*affirmation, still appears as harmful, diverting people with false hopes of heaven hereafter.
Reasonable minds look to other means for survival.*²⁴

How does secular humanism undermine a Biblical worldview? Secular humanism emerged out of the enlightenment era, where rationalism and free thought dominated the public square. However, its roots really go all the way back to ancient China, Rome and classical Greece. Secular humanism is defined as “everyone who believes in the principles of free inquiry, ethics based upon reason, and a commitment to science, democracy, and freedom.”²⁵ Unlike the Biblical view where man is under God and is dependent on Him for everything, a central tenet for secular humanists is individual autonomy. Humanists believe that, “Too often traditional faiths encourage dependence rather than independence, obedience rather than affirmation, fear rather than courage.”²⁶ Guided by reason, inspired by compassion and informed by experience, humanists hold that humans eke out their livelihood on these principles and chart their own destiny:²⁷

*We (secular humanists) find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of survival and fulfillment of the human race. As nontheists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity.*²⁸

Secular humanists do not believe in the supernatural because their fundamental beliefs are based on naturalism. In other words, everything from the origin of man, structure of things, morality and the universe can be explained in terms of natural causes and laws. Although secular humanists eschew any belief in a supernatural and a transcendent being, their worldview goes beyond concerns of the nonexistence of God or the supernatural. Believing that the natural world is all that there is, secular humanists have the goals of humans flourishing and maximizing individual happiness. They place great emphasis on individual freedom, self-actualization, human progress/happiness and social justice.

Since God is out of the picture, man is the measure of all things. That is, man is his own god; he creates and gives meaning to his life.²⁹ The meaning of life is predicated on

²⁴ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_ii

²⁵ <https://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php/3260> (Paul Kurtz)

²⁶ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_ii

²⁷ Humanist Manifesto III

²⁸ Humanist Manifesto II

achievements and how well humans treat each other. Life has no purpose beyond helping one another to realize their full potential. The view that life has no meaning and purpose without divine guidance is regarded as “the most pervasive illusion about nature that science has to confront on a daily basis.”³⁰ The tendency to cling to the assumption that it is unthinkable to live without a God-driven purpose is seen as an illusion. Fortunately for the secular humanists, science has “taught them to think the unthinkable,”³¹ where man’s will and intelligence are enough to help create a desired future. Reason enables man to determine what is right or wrong, good or bad. Isaac Asimov, a scientist, author, and past president of the American Humanist Association, says that: “Humanists recognize that it is only when people feel free to think for themselves, using reason as their guide that they are best capable of developing values that succeed in satisfying human needs and serving human interests.”³² The problem with ethics and morality that are not backed by a transcendent power is that:

*For every ethical theory developed apart from some account of transcendent truth—of, that is, the spiritual or metaphysical foundation of reality—is a fragile fiction, credible only to those sufficiently obstinate in their willing suspension of disbelief. If one does not wish to be convinced, however, a simple “I disagree” or “I refuse” is enough to exhaust the persuasive resources of any purely worldly ethics.*³³

Essentially, humanists uphold that ethics are judged by what individuals produce with their lives; acceptable ethics are those that maximize utility. This is an “end justifies the means” mentality. Additionally, “moral values derive their source from human experience.”³⁴ Consequently, man’s needs and interests are tested by experience and form conventional morality as a result. The top priority of man according to this worldview is to “strive for the good life, here and now.”³⁵

If human beliefs determine human conduct—which it does—and if what we believe about our origins greatly influences our worldview—which it does—then what does pursuing justice

²⁹ Human life has meaning because we create and develop our futures. (Humanist Manifesto II)

³⁰ <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/apr/01/opinion/la-oe-krauss-cosmology-design-universe-20120401>

³¹ <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/apr/01/opinion/la-oe-krauss-cosmology-design-universe-20120401>

³² http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Quotations_from_Famous_Humanists

³³ Hart p15, 2009

³⁴ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_ii

³⁵ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_ii

devoid of God, objective meaning and a future hope beyond the material world or absolute morality actually boil down to?

- Man is the savior and the hero of his own story because flourishing depends on man and man alone.
- The answers must be found in the here and now.
- There is no consolation beyond what one has in the here and now.
- What is good or bad changes according to new knowledge or discoveries.
- In place of God, reason is the sole criterion for reality and truth.

What does pursuing justice without a belief in the Imago Dei look like? According to a secular humanism belief system, man is not fearfully and wonderfully made by God:

*Rather, science affirms that the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces. As far as we know, the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context.*³⁶

Like the universe, mankind is part of nature: “Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change.”³⁷ As Christians, the question that we need to address here is: *If we are here by chance and we are a mere combination of atoms/chemicals and matter, as this statement says, then how is it possible for something that has emerged from worthless material to have inherent worth/value and dignity?* Inherent worth and human dignity are pillars of justice. So, what basis should secular humanists claim to promote justice? In secular humanism, human worth and dignity are merely assumed: “We are committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity, and to making informed choices in a context of freedom consonant with responsibility.”³⁸ Humanists would also argue that while man is closely related to other primates, he alone is uniquely endowed with intellect and the ability to reason. This puts man on top of the totem pole. His dignity and worth is found in his humanness, not in his likeness to the divine. So again without meaning, purpose or objective value, this view insists we should be compelled to work for a just and prosperous world based on our shared humanity. In simple

³⁶ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_ii

³⁷ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_iii

³⁸ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_iii

terms, humanists commit to treating each person with inherent value because all are human. Thus, secular humanists rationale for justice is grounded in:

- Shared common humanity
- Science/evolution and a morality based on current human needs and interests
- Assumed respect, dignity and worth of all persons
- The assumption that man has no eternal soul or hope after death

Secular humanists' practice of monism "find that the traditional dualism of mind and body must be rejected."³⁹ Monism is a "theory or doctrine that denies the existence of a distinction or duality in some sphere, such as that between matter and mind, or God and the world."⁴⁰ This means that all our problems are metaphysical, not ethical; there is no link between the physical and the spiritual. Sin, the scope of sin and its impact is totally denied. There is no *soul*, as Christians believe, that is made in the Imago Dei; instead there is only the *self*. This explains why self-actualization is one of humanism's central tenets. Furthermore, without an eternal spirit man, there is no hope for a future after death. Secular humanists affirm that, "There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body. We continue to exist in our progeny and in the way that our lives have influenced others in our culture."⁴¹ Thus, according to humanists, humans should live their present lives, not in view of eternity as Christians do but in light of the influence and legacy they want to leave behind. Anything to make this world a better place is highly prized; without a future hope, all that is left is man and the universe. To pursue justice from this humanist perspective that denies the eternal Imago Dei means:

- Justifying the means if the end provides the desired results
- Exalting human needs and interests
- Pursuing human flourishing by all means
- Improving this world and attempting to make it a utopia, free of pain and suffering
- Maximizing whatever provides pleasure so long as it "harms" no one

What does pursuing justice without a belief in the fall of man look like? Secular humanists reject the ideas of the fall and original sin. Their cardinal belief is that man is

³⁹ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_i

⁴⁰ <https://www.google.com/#q=Monism+definition>

⁴¹ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_ii

essentially good. They justify the cause of the problems in the world not according to man's sinful nature but according to man's environment. Hence, what man needs is not a Savior or a change of heart but rather a change of environment. Hope for the world does not lie in reckoning with our sinful rebellion before a holy God; rather, humanists contend that hope is found in rejecting all religious ideologies or moral codes that undermine man's ability to "pull themselves by their own bootstraps." Secular humanists believe that:

*Man will learn to face the crises of life in terms of his knowledge of their naturalness and probability. Reasonable and manly attitudes will be fostered by education and supported by custom. We assume that humanism will take the path of social and mental hygiene and discourage sentimental and unreal hopes and wishful thinking.*⁴²

According to humanists, science can account for the causes of the ills that plague society and it will also provide the solutions for suffering. Suffering is attached to generic causes, so it has no purpose or meaning. Pain and suffering are explained not as part of the fallen world we inhabit but rather as misfortune, bad luck or ignorance.

Through education, humanists propose that behaviors can be modified and refined for the betterment of society:

*We believe in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in the place of dogma, truth instead of ignorance, joy rather than guilt or sin, tolerance in the place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness, beauty instead of ugliness, and reason rather than blind faith or irrationality.*⁴³

Thus, the fight against human suffering and evil must be confronted by humanists not with the bloody cross of the Son of Man but with "optimism," "truth," "joy," "tolerance," "love," "compassion," "beauty," and "reason." In other words, if humans are responsible for that which goes wrong then humans are also responsible for making it right. Humanism teaches that we are capable of making things right but only if we rely upon ourselves instead of putting off the responsibility to others, i.e. God. James W. Sire, a Christian author, speaker, and former editor for InterVarsity Press, exposes an important contradiction in this humanist line of thought,

⁴² http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_i

⁴³ <https://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php/12>

especially with regard to pursuing justice: “Could a being whose origins were so ‘iffy’ trust his or her own capacity to know,” what is the best and noblest path to justice?⁴⁴ If man has a natural disposition to do good, to love and not hate, to give and not steal, to tell the truth and not lie, and the revealed truth of inherent sinfulness of man is myth, then how do humanists achieve justice?

- Through human instruments alone
- By training/education and providing a proper environment
- Via freedom of choice.

What does pursuing justice without a belief in the redemption story look like? Secular humanists do not believe in the corrupt nature of man, so the concept of redemption is also alien. The problem, as they see it, is not that man cannot solve his own problems but rather man needs to eliminate “traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience.” According to secular humanists, it is “immoral” to wait for God to act on our behalf. We have the power, technology, science and freedom to create the world we want: “The responsibility for the kind of world in which we live rests with us.”⁴⁵ They disdain “heroic personalities” (e.g. Jesus), “dogmatic creeds” (e.g. Biblical doctrine), and “ritual customs of past religions” (e.g. baptism, communion, Sunday worship).⁴⁶ They advocate for not being paralyzed by the unknown or inexplicable because lack of the capacity to comprehend everything does not exempt us from being “responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.”⁴⁷ The past, present and future lie squarely in our capable hands. The story of the cross is irrelevant; we are our own saviors. Man’s achievements and accomplishments thus far, such as going to the moon or advancements in technology and science, demonstrate that:

We stand at the dawn of a new age... we can control our environment, conquer poverty, markedly reduce disease, extend our life-span, significantly modify our behavior, alter the

⁴⁴ Sire p93,2009

⁴⁵ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/what_is_humanism

⁴⁶ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_ii

⁴⁷ http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_II

*course of human evolution and cultural development, unlock vast new powers, and provide humankind with unparalleled opportunity for achieving an abundant and meaningful life.*⁴⁸

Through human intelligence, science and technology, humanists contend, man will conquer and overcome every obstacle—including every injustice—that stands in his way of him reaching his maximum potential. However daunting the future may be, or to whatever degree it is filled with uncertainty, humanists trust that “man will learn to face the crises of life in terms of his knowledge of their naturalness and probability.”⁴⁹

A CHRISTIAN/BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

*A Christian worldview “offers a narrative of all history. This narrative starts with God’s special creation of human beings, delves into the consequences of their fall from grace, and promises redemption through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross and his subsequent resurrection.”*⁵⁰

A RIGHT VIEW OF GOD: JUSTICE, LOVE AND THE THEODICY CHALLENGE

Does pain and suffering have a purpose? “Theodicy” refers to the problem of good and evil in the Christian tradition. In other words, it is a single word that captures an age-old question: “Why does a good God let bad things happen?” To understand the objective reason for pain and suffering we must have a right view of an infinite God juxtaposed with our finite mind. The story of Job in the Bible is a great illustration of how we should view suffering and respond to it. God is depicted as an inside agent; without Job’s knowledge God allows Satan to torment him. Moreover, God is not a complicit observer; He is the one calling the shots and though Satan intends to harm and do evil, God uses him for His eternal plan. Satan hoped that by afflicting adversity on Job and completely destroying his life he would prove to God that people follow Him for what He does, not for who He is. Ultimately, in the same way that the heathen god Dagon fell face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD,⁵¹ Satan fell flat on his face, but Job’s faith and understanding of God was sharpened. Job proclaimed, “I had heard of

⁴⁸ http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_II

⁴⁹ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_i

⁵⁰ Myers and Noebel p11, 2016

⁵¹ 1 Samuel 5:3

you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.”⁵² What we can learn from the story of Job is that there is intentionality behind everything God designed, including suffering. Job’s life also reminds us that God always justifies our suffering; that is, He never lets our suffering go to waste.

Sometimes His purposes for our pain are revealed to us, and other times we do not have that privilege. But what remains is assurance that God is good and just, even when our circumstances are not. Among other lessons, we learn from this story that God is always in control and history is really is just that: “His” story. Relatedly, Job’s biography highlights the fact that God knows and that Satan (and all that Satan represents: evil, injustice, suffering, death) has an expiration date. Satan is on a leash, so evil can only go as far as God permits. As we pursue justice this should give us the confidence to trust the Author of our life, even in the face of seemingly unrelenting evil, knowing that He is perfect and just in all His ways (Deuteronomy 32:4). The assurance is ours, that before we appear on the world’s stage, God is already there working on our behalf, making all things come together for our good and His glory.

Furthermore, it is vital to have a reverent fear of God in order to have a proper perspective on pain and suffering. Stevenson argues that “It is the recognition that the goodness of God is so alien in its holiness that human life must encounter it in awestruck fear and perhaps something resembling terror and horror.”⁵³ To pursue justice in a fallen world we must reckon with our finite mind and humbly accept that our standards of good are oftentimes inferior. That is, we can be dumbfounded by the tragedies we encounter and even doubt God’s purposes in them, but we must never doubt what we know about God’s character: his goodness, his justice, his kindness and mercy. C.S. Lewis asserts that because God is wiser than us, “His judgment must differ from ours on many things, and not least on good and evil. What seems to us good may therefore not be good in His eyes, and what seems to us evil may not be evil.”⁵⁴ Trusting God’s goodness and judgment does not mean that we accept evil without opposition. It simply means that there are some things we might never understand or be able to explain away.⁵⁵

⁵²Job 42:5

⁵³ Stevenson p70, 2013

⁵⁴ Lewis p13, 1940

⁵⁵ “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (Deuteronomy 29:29)

What we know is “[God] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [Jesus].”⁵⁶ Faith is needed to embrace this type of worldview because it goes against our natural inclination to rely on our strength and abilities. This type of faith “does not call us to be heroes fighting evil, but to love the one who has already defeated it.”⁵⁷ Our endeavor to advance justice ought to bring us close to God and change us more into His image. In the Chronicles of Narnia series by C.S. Lewis, the main character and protagonist, Aslan, is depicted as gentle and loving, but Lewis also reminds us that Aslan, who represents God, is “not a tame lion” but is powerful and can be dangerous. As Christians it important to disabuse ourselves of the sissified images of God that cause us to imagine Him as our “homeboy” or “Uncle Joe.” A. W Tozer says:

*"The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He is--in itself a monstrous sin--and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness. Always this God will conform to the image of the one who created it and will be base or pure, cruel or kind, according to the moral state of the mind from which it emerges."*⁵⁸

Our concept of God must give us allowance to accept God on His terms, to see Him for who He truly is, and to come to the same realization as Job:

²“I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
³‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
⁴‘Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.’
⁵I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;

⁵⁶ Colossians 2:15

⁵⁷ Stevenson p30, 2013

⁵⁸ Tozer, p4, 1961

⁶ therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.”⁵⁹

God is sovereign. No purpose of His can be “thwarted,” not even “random” acts of terrorism, rape, murder, unyielding racism, discrimination, exploitation. Indeed, all of these can be redeemed to serve His greater eternal purpose. When the world gives us reason to despair, the Gospel gives us reason to hope. When we adopt a right view of God, we have:

- Boldness to go into hard places and difficult situations and speak of a God who cares in the face of seemingly senseless suffering
- Courage to speak without fear in the face of overwhelming evil, because we know there is a limit to all things
- Peace in the midst of trying circumstances, because we know God is in control
- Confidence because we know how the story ends: Suffering and pain do not have the last word; God does.

Our Origin

“The struggle to find objective purpose and meaning is inextricably intertwined with the question of our origins.”⁶⁰

Why should Christians pursue justice? There are many reasons why Christians should pursue justice. Firstly, God loves justice; there are over 200 verses in the Bible that speak about justice. Secondly, if you are in right standing with God then pursuing justice is not a choice but a command. Jeremiah writes,

Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.⁶¹

Thirdly, and most importantly, by virtue of being created in His image we have certain rights. Our God-given rights give us human dignity and worth, and this truth should compel to seek the

⁵⁹ Job 42:2-6

⁶⁰ Murray p63, 2014

⁶¹ Jeremiah 22:3

protection of others' rights. Secular humanists ostensibly believe that humans have dignity and worth independent of God; however, without God it is impossible to uphold human value and worth objectively. The essence of human value and the meaning of life stem from and are sustained by our connection to God: "Without God, man loses his bearing in this world, and he cannot find them again till he has found the One whose world it is. God made our life, and God alone can tell us its meaning."⁶² It is God who gives us our intrinsic value, independent of any external opinion or circumstance. It is difficult to respect cells and atoms in the same way you respect someone with a soul, mind and heart. It is wrong to discriminate, exploit women and children or deny justice to the poor, because there is something sacred about human beings. It is worth noting that in Genesis God says,

*Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.*⁶³

Why would God require the lifeblood of animals if they hurt us? God will require the lifeblood of even animals that injure humans because we are made in His image. When people are mistreated or hurt, God hurts too and weeps with them because what affects us also affects Him. Sin offends God primarily and for that reason He will not let any wrong go unpunished. Sin is an offense against the sanctity of life, which derives from our very origin.

The Bible says God created the universe and created man (male and female) in His image (the "Imago Dei") (Gen 1:1-27). We are God's prime creation. It is critical for us to understand what the image of God is in man, because it underlies our claim to justice. In order to grasp the image of God in man, first we have to understand who God is. God's revelation of himself in the Bible can be classified in two groups: incommunicable characteristics that set God apart (that is, no one shares them; they are His alone) and communicable characteristics (that God chose to share with man). The incommunicable attributes of God include, but are not limited to, His omnipotence (Job 11:7-11), omniscience (Psalms 139:1-4) and omnipresence (Psalms 139:7-10). God's communicable qualities are his goodness (Psalms 34:8), holiness (1Pet 1:16), righteousness (Psalms 145:17), justice (Isaiah 16:8) and truth (Hebrews 6:18).

⁶² J. I Parker

⁶³ Genesis 9:5-6

There is no clarification in the Bible as to exactly what God meant when He said “lets us make man in our image.” However, what is clear is that man is not like other created beings. He alone possesses the ability to think and reason. This uniqueness is also expressed in the very words “*lets us make*” instead of “*let there be*.” Man is depicted as the crowning work of God’s excellency. Biblical scholars and theologians have differing theories on what the image of God in man is. However, for this paper the image of God in man is composed of all God’s communicable characteristics which make us moral agents. This is where we derive our sense of justice—from His image, not from years of evolution. So you see why what we believe about our origin is important. We are moral agents because we exhibit God’s communicable attributes. Our moral values come from God, not from natural law or consensus. Nonetheless, “the moral qualities which belonged to the divine image in us were lost when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. As a result, God’s image in man has been universally defaced, for all human kind has in one way or another lapsed into ungodliness.”⁶⁴ However, God works to restore that image through the Christians.⁶⁵ Christians accomplish this by becoming “...imitators of God, as beloved children.” (Ephesians 5:1)⁶⁶ We imitate God by our lifestyle, words, deeds and, ultimately, by our love, in our attempt to love as He loves us.⁶⁷ At the same time, our understanding of suffering and pain “will be influenced by whether we affirm or deny (or have

⁶⁴ Packer p100, 1993

⁶⁵ Christians are those who are born of God and call Him father. John 1:12-13 states “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” In other words, Christians are those who have been *reborn* and *adopted* into the family of God. What makes Christianity unique is that we do not earn God’s favor by works rather God Himself reaches out to us (Romans 5:8) and not only rescues us but imparts new life in us and then gives us the power to live the new life

⁶⁶ To imitate God we must know Him. Knowing him involves engaging several spiritual disciplines:

⁶⁷ Love as defined by Him not us. C.S. Lewis gives us a splendid understanding of love here: By the goodness of God we mean nowadays almost exclusively His lovingness; and in this we may be right. And by Love, in this context, most of us mean kindness—the desire to see others than the self happy; not happy in this way or in that, but just happy... I might, indeed, have learned, even from the poets, that Love is something more stern and splendid than mere kindness: that even the love between the sexes is, as in Dante, ‘a lord of terrible aspect’. There is kindness in Love: but Love and kindness are not coterminous, and when kindness (in the sense given above) is separated from the other elements of Love, it involves a certain fundamental indifference to its object, and even something like contempt of it. Kindness consents very readily to the removal of its object – we have all met people whose kindness to animals is constantly leading them to kill animals lest they should suffer. Kindness, merely as such, cares not whether its object becomes good or bad, provided only that it escapes suffering. As Scripture points out, it is bastards who are spoiled: the legitimate sons, who are to carry on the family tradition, are punished. (Hebrews 12:8) It is for people whom we care nothing about that we demand happiness on any terms: with our friends, our lovers, our children, we are exacting and would rather see them suffer much than be happy in contemptible and estranging modes. If God is Love, He is, by definition, something more than mere kindness. And it appears, from all the records, that though He has often rebuked us and condemned us, He has never regarded us with contempt. He has paid us the intolerable compliment of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense. (pp. 35-37, 1996)

no beliefs about) the existence of a divine being.”⁶⁸ If we believe in a divine being, it is wise that we seek to understand his divine purpose for us and the world and, when we find it, submit to it.

A Biblical explanation of the origin and identity of mankind helps us to:

- Pursue justice with fervor because it is the will of the Author of our lives.
- Know that God is the measure of all standards. He is our moral compass of what is good, right, wrong, just and evil. Thus, we are free from disorder and confusion about absolute standards.
- Know humans have inherent purpose in life. We are not just matter; we are created in God’s image. We are both physical and spiritual beings.
- Know that God is the rightful owner of our story and how it ends.

The Fall

“It is because we rejected the doctrine of original sin that we on the left were always being disillusioned by the behavior of both the people and the nations and politicians, and by the recurrent fact of war.”⁶⁹

Can we understand injustice without a right view of human nature? The doctrine of the fall/original sin gives us the category to understanding the source of suffering in the world. Looking to the concept of original sin turns us to the origins of evil and injustice. The concept of original sin stems from this first act of disobedience. Original sin does not mean the beginning of sin or how sin started but rather the corruption of our spiritual DNA. In other words, we are not sinners because of the bad things we do; we do bad things because we are sinners. We simply cannot help it. Sin originates from within not from without.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Adam’s failure did not only affect him and Eve but also the entirety of humanity. Although we were not physically present when Adam and Eve disobeyed, because they are our ancestral parents or federal head, we inherited their nature.⁷¹ No matter where you fall on this issue, the plain truth is not hard to see: humans have a natural propensity towards selfishness, self-centeredness, self-exaltation,

⁶⁸ Murray p33,2014

⁶⁹ (C.E.M. Joad, British philosopher.)

⁷⁰ “And he said, what comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (Mark 7:20-23)

⁷¹ Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

lying, idolatry, adultery, anger, revenge, racism, lust, gluttony, greed, exploitation, envy, pride, etc. Some have called this the “human stain”. We are corrupt from the moment we are conceived.⁷²

The concept of original sin shines light on human nature and the ultimate solution to human suffering. Instead of reacting to the effects of sin, a proper perspective of original sin⁷³ and the scope of sin will help us develop a balanced and mature response to the suffering in the world. Most importantly, understanding the theory of original sin will free us from thinking about evil and injustice in the world in terms of an us (good) versus them (bad) dichotomy. Evil and injustice are not merely external, “The problem of evil is not simply or purely a cosmic thing; it is also a problem about me.”⁷⁴ Therefore, the intersection of faith and justice on issues of religious persecution, racism, inequality, exploitation, discrimination and the neglect of vulnerable populations starts with us. Knowing that “all mankind are by nature in a state of total ruin, both with respect to the moral evil of which they are the subjects, and the afflictive evil to which they are exposed, the one as the consequence and punishment of the other...” is key in guiding our steps towards making this world a better place.⁷⁵ We are all sinners and complicit in the evil that plagues our world and our condition necessitates God’s rescue plan. If we need to know how to advance justice, we need first to understand our fallen spiritual state. In Genesis 2:16-17 it says: And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” Not long after this commandment, in Genesis 3, we read the following:

⁷² “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” (Psalms 51:5)

⁷³ There are two main theories about this notion of original sin and how we are all implicated. One is called federal or representative theory: This view holds that God made Adam the representative of the human race and, because he was our legally constituted representative, his sin was legally imputed to us. So the moment we are born our souls are legally/justly imputed with sin. The second one is called the realist or Augustinian theory. This holds the view that when Adam committed his sin, the whole essence of human nature was present and active in his disobedience, thus all of mankind committed it with him. Augustine asserts, “Nothing remains but to conclude that in the first man all are understood to have sinned, because all were in him when he sinned; whereby sin is brought in with birth and not removed save by the new birth... it is manifest that in Adam all sinned, so to speak, en masse. By that sin we became a corrupt mass.” **For further readings on this theory you can...**

⁷⁴ Wright p97, 2006

⁷⁵ Jonathan Edwards, The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended, in Jonathan Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, 10th ed., 2 vols. (Edinburgh/Carlisle, Penn: Banner of Truth, 1979, 1:1)

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.⁷⁶

What the Genesis story recounts is a cataclysmic downfall that would affect Adam's race, the cosmos, and our relationship with each other and most importantly with God. Adam and Eve's disobedience not only placed us under God's wrath but brought suffering and physical and spiritual death into the world. In these verses we are given a picture of the tempter, who is the snake (here representing Satan who is against us and God), and Adam and Eve disobeying God's command. They wanted to possess the knowledge of good and evil, and in essence to become their own gods, charting their own destiny. We see three things happening:

- The snake makes a promise that is half true and half a lie (they got the knowledge but it cost them everything)
- Adam and Eve were deceived by relying on their senses/instincts (good for food, pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining wisdom)
- Adam and Eve's attempt to remedy the situation using fig leaves to cover their nakedness, shame and guilt.

⁷⁶ Genesis 3:1-7

While it is a central tenet of Christian orthodoxy, they are certain people, even theologians, who dispute original sin "which is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved..."⁷⁷ You do not have to look far to see that we are all corrupted. Simply look within and you will see contradictions and inconsistencies in our thoughts and actions. Our bad actions are not the issue per se but our condition is. Having a proper view of human nature helps us as Christians address injustices in the world better than if we thought of humans as essentially good creatures simply in need of a better governing system. Good governance is desirable, but when the people in it are not good, they cannot stop the holocaust from occurring. However, just as the sin of one man engendered universal collateral damage, the answer to this universal damage also is another Man. Unlike Adam who failed, the second Adam (Jesus) triumphed and his victory has universal reverberation. Thus we can see and agree, at this point, that the Christian story of God's work in Christ is foundational to our pursuit of justice in the world:

- Injustices are a consequence of sin against a holy God
- To address the evil that spur injustices we need to understand the doctrine of original sin, the scope of sin and human nature
- The cross/Gospel is the ultimate answer to all injustices.

REDEMPTION

*"After the original sin that fractured and marred creation and ourselves, there was no going back before it. The story of God's salvation in Scripture leads to a **new heaven** and earth, but this is not a return to **Eden** as if sin and the fall never happened. It is the Lamb who was slain who rules in the new heaven and earth."*⁷⁸

What does redemption have to do with justice? God's eternal purpose for man and the world is revealed through the doctrine of redemption. The term redemption means to *ransom* or *buy back*. According to the doctrine of original sin, humankind needs a Redeemer because we are enslaved to sin⁷⁹ and we cannot save ourselves.⁸⁰ It is through the provision of Jesus as our

⁷⁷ G. K. Chesterton

⁷⁸ <http://restorativejustice.org/am-site/media/love-and-justice.pdf>

⁷⁹ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.(John 8:34)

⁸⁰ Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, (Psalms 49:6-7)

substitute that “God’s mercy ransoms man from God’s justice.”⁸¹ Jesus came “as the Son of Man not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁸² Without the redemption story mankind had no hope in this world or the world to come. Now the price Jesus paid for our redemption means there is a way out from the bondage of sin⁸³, wrath of God and the consequence of sin⁸⁴ Through the Gospel, God has provided the answer to the human condition of being sinful from birth (Psalms 51:5) and the problem of evil, both of which are consequences of our rejection of God. As Christians, the relief we seek to provide and the battles we fight on behalf of vulnerable populations must be viewed in light of eternity. Like Adam and Eve, our dilemma goes beyond temporal misfortunes and the devastation we face in this world. Our absolute dilemma is that we are disconnected from the source of life, truth, love and justice. The injustice and evil we see in the world are a result of our fallen state before God – our rebellion against the Creator – and by our labor for justice God is able to reconcile the world back to Himself through His church.

We labor for justice not with the pervasive illusion that any particular government system has the ability to eradicate evil or injustice. Rather, we press on because we have a redemption story to tell. Jeremiah asks the exiles of Judah, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil?”⁸⁵ The point of this statement is that, like the people of Judah, we all are incapable of changing our condition and therefore incapable of doing good. We corrupt everything we touch even when we intend to do well; a bad tree cannot produce good fruit (Matt 7:18) except if a miracle happens. The redemption story not only answers all human dilemmas but it is the only hope we have in the cause for justice

God makes the benefits of redemption (forgiveness of sin, reconciliation, eternal future) available to everyone through the act of repentance. Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to

⁸¹ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. II

⁸² Matthew 20:28

⁸³ Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (Romans 8:1-2)

⁸⁴ ...and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10)

⁸⁵ Jeremiah 13:23

repentance.”⁸⁶ Therefore, on account of what Jesus has done, Christians have an obligation not only to meet people’s felt needs but to also meet their spiritual needs by sharing the good news of the Gospel. On one hand, the doctrine of redemption gives us the means to talk about deliverance, healing, freedom and restoration. On the other hand, God’s redemptive plan does not exclude conversations about suffering. In fact, Jesus warned His disciples with these words: “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”⁸⁷ As Christians, knowing God’s perfect redemptive plan motivates us to pursue justice because God has given us a view of the end from the beginning.

Conclusion: The Gospel as Our Only Hope for True Justice

If the church is going to engage issues of public concern and the common good, it must do so in a way that does not compromise the fundamental nature of its power, which derives completely from the cross of Christ and the Holy Spirit...⁸⁸

Worldviews have significant implications on how we live and act. For better or worse, a worldview informs our actions and thinking about reality. Therefore, for Christians, it is important that we do not look to the “experts” for pursuing justice in this world but instead to the foundational truths of our doctrine. Without a firm hold on our doctrine, it is easy to lose hope or pin our hopes in human abilities. Like Adam and Eve, we can temporarily work to cover the pressing injustices with fig leaves: fig leaves in the form of economic empowerment, changing social structures, education, culture transformation, etc. But doing so does not address the deeper problem of our humanity. We must recalibrate our thought compass with a Biblical understanding not only of our present sufferings but also our ultimate suffering if we place our hope outside of Christ.⁸⁹ C.S. Lewis said, “God can’t give us peace and happiness apart from Himself because there is no such thing.” The Bible is our surest guidebook for understanding why injustices exist and what our role is in reconciling our broken world back to God. But

⁸⁶ Luke 5:31-32

⁸⁷ John 16:33

⁸⁸ Stevenson P198, 2012

⁸⁹ “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10:28

perhaps more importantly, the Bible offers us a hope that humanism cannot: that all injustices will one day be righted, not by man—whose efforts inevitably fall short—but by a good and righteous God, whose very name is Justice.

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