

SOCIAL ACTION
“doing good to all men”
(see also Poverty #821)

Key question

What is the role of the church in social action within the broader community?

Key text

Galatians 6:10

“So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

Key Definition

Social Action

The church, acting within society as a model of peace and justice is the primary instrument for social change in God’s plan.

Introduction

1. Four basic questions:
 - a. To what extent does the Biblical teaching on social justice apply to **modern** society?
 1. Do the rules for a traditional agrarian culture apply to modern complex social and economic systems?
 2. Do Biblical ends (love) justify means (in modern culture) that are not explicit in Biblical teaching (in traditional culture)?
 - b. To what extent does the Biblical teaching on social justice apply to **worldly** (outside the covenant community) society?
 1. It is quite clear that most of the Biblical instruction on social justice is directed to the relationships within the covenant community of faith. What is its significance to the broader secular society?
 2. Can and should the domain of Kingdom ethics realistically extend to the whole world in an age where many are not committed to Christ?

- c. What is the **agenda** of social justice?
 - 1. Is the agenda primarily economic and political or does it extend to private and personal conduct as well?
 - 2. Is the agenda to include social systems as well as persons?
 - d. To what extent can social justice teaching be divorced from **personal redemption in Christ**?
 - 1. Is the essence of the Gospel, social justice? Is the heart of the Christian message embodied in the incarnation or the crucifixion? Is the message centered on personal redemption or social reform?
 - 2. Should and can we expect to tame the world and make it more just apart from personal conversion and faith in Christ?
 - 3. Should and can we work for social justice apart from preaching the Gospel of personal faith in Christ?
2. Secularization (defining reality and making decisions as though God did not exist or matter) has had a powerful and irreversible effect upon the developing cultures of the world.
- a. Wolfhart Pannenberg's three aspects of the long-term effects of secularism from *Christianity in a Secularized World* (pp33-38)
 - 1. **The loss of legitimation in the institutional ordering of society.** That is, without a belief in the divine origin of the world there is no foundation for order. Political rule becomes "merely the exercising of power, and citizens would then inevitably feel that they were delivered over to the whim of those who had power."
 - 2. **The collapse of the universal validity of traditional morality and consciousness of law.** Much of this can be attributed to the influence of Immanuel Kant, the eighteenth-century German philosopher, who taught that moral norms were binding even without religion.
 - 3. **The individual in his or her struggle towards orientation and identity is hardest hit by the loss of a meaningful focus of commitment.** This leads to a sense of "homelessness and alienation" and "neurotic deviations." The loss of the "sacred and ultimate" has left its mark as a state of fragile equilibrium in the system of secular society.
 - b. It has created a common human history that unites all peoples as they share increasingly a **common expectation** about the future, about human rights, dignity, technological development, etc.
 - c. It has directed human hopes away from the next life and centered them on the **temporal issues** of this life.
 - d. It has rendered traditional religion (including Christianity) **less relevant** to the lives and in the minds of many common people.
 - e. It has influenced the Christian church's understanding and practice of **ministry**. It has forced the church to ask, "How should we address a modern society?"

- f. In parts of the third world, secularism has produced the kinds of social, economic, and cultural **reforms** that for years Christian missionaries (committed to social reform) were unsuccessful in bringing about. This has been a challenge to the liberal wing of the church to reassess its methods and reason to exist.
- g. The **challenge** to the evangelical church is not to deplore the process of secularization but rather to understand its power to bring openness to the preaching of the Gospel as well as its power to create deep skepticism toward it.
- h. Three positive aspects of secularism.
 1. There is strong historical evidence to suggest that the **root** of modern science and technology are in the biblical understanding of man and nature.
 2. As a driving power that is drawing all men into the **single world civilization**, it is a secularized form of the biblical eschatology.
 3. Secularism's dissolution of traditional culture's attempts to create a unified understanding of the cosmos apart from God (pictured in the tower of **Babel**) is in the pattern of the biblical prophetic message.
- 3. Evangelicals have been influenced by different models of Christian ministry.
 - a. Is ministry to be based on the incarnation or the crucifixion?

Understanding of:	Model #1	Model #2
Christian basis	The Incarnation	The Crucifixion
Sphere of application	The World	The Church
Justice and peace	Social, Political	Spiritual, Personal
Emphasis in ministry	Social action (body savers)	Evangelism, Discipleship (soul savers)
Political philosophy	Liberal	Conservative
The Kingdom	Economic justice, Political power sharing, World peace.	Regenerate, mature, church community.
Basic problem	Systemic evil	Personal sin
Scriptural Support	Parts of Gospels and OT Prophets	Epistles
Problems	Biblical social ethics focus on covenant Community infrastructure not the world.	Over reaction to model #1

- b. Is ministry to be patterned after the First or the Second Great Awakening in American history?

First Great Awakening	Second Great Awakening
Early 1700s	Early 1800s
New England	Southern states
Church based	Parachurch based
Pulpit preaching	Mass revival meetings
Rural small communities	Urban areas
Jonathan Edwards	Charles Finney
Intellectual / Apologetical	Emotional / Confessional
Deterministic	Manipulative
Calvinistic theology	Arminian theology
Puritanism	Birth of modern evangelicalism
Doctrinal	Experiential

4. To what extent are these models to be exclusive or inclusive of each other?
 - a. It is clear that both models find supportive material in the New Testament.
 - b. Until the early years of the twentieth century the evangelical church was active in social issues but after the liberal churches adopted an aggressive social action emphasis, evangelicals retreated from that sphere. Modern societies have pressured the church to adopt Model #1 as an accommodation to secularization.
 - c. The Biblical emphasis seems to be on that salvation of souls not bodies. But it must be remembered that the love of God cannot ignore suffering and injustice in the world and especially in the church.
5. People have related the Biblical story to society in one of three ways in response to the growing secularization of society.

<i>Transcribers</i>	<i>Translators</i>	<i>Transformers</i>
The Biblical message is applied literally to modern society with little or no attention to the differences between modern culture and Biblical culture.	The Biblical message is applied in principle to modern society giving careful attention to the unique cultural settings of both the Biblical text and the present.	The Biblical message is freely altered to fit the values of modern culture.
We simply transcribe the Biblical text in a literal way to our present situation.	We translate the Biblical message in a way that directs its principle teaching to our present situation.	We change the Biblical message or select only portions of it that seem to fit the common sense of the modern situation.

6. Critical questions evangelicals must address in the face of the secularization of culture.

- a. **What is the meaning of Social Justice?**
 1. Is it “to each according to the person’s merit or demerit” (capitalistic)
 2. Or is it “to each according to a standard of equality” (socialistic)
 - b. **How does “compassion” relate to “justice?”**
 1. The state has a responsibility to promote justice but does it also have a responsibility to legislate compassion or mercy?
 2. Is a loving response going to promote justice, mercy, or both?
 - c. **Are Human Beings Individual or Communal?**
 1. In what sense is Adam both male and female in Gen.1?
 2. Does God covenant with individuals or with communities (Israel, the Body of Christ)?
 - d. **How Should the Church be Involved Politically?**
 1. Anabaptists - political critique and alternative communal modeling.
 2. Reformed - subjugating the institutions of the world to the Lordship of Christ.
 - e. **Are the ethical responsibilities of Christians within the covenant community different from their responsibilities of the state outside the covenant community?**
 1. Who is my neighbor?
 2. Who is my brother? Is a brother different than a neighbor?
 - f. **What is the relationship between Evangelism and Social Justice?**
 1. **Conservative** - Evangelism of the individual is the only really important issue.
 2. **Moderate** - Social Justice is an important visual aid to evangelism.
 3. **Reformists** - Social justice is the mission task of the church in bringing all creation under the Lordship of Christ.
 4. **Radical** - Social justice and evangelism are separate but equal mandates for the church.
7. **Some personal observations.**
- a. **Christian citizens have a public moral agenda that can best be described as support of “the common good.” Gal.6:10** “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”
 - b. **The Biblical teaching on social ethics is focused primarily on the in-house affairs of the covenant community of faith.** Application of that teaching to a secular state requires sensitivity to the assumptions behind the teaching (basically, the indwelling Holy Spirit and the common faith / values of God’s Kingdom).
 - c. **Biblical moral teaching covers a broad range of subjects (including public issues like the care of the poor, war, human rights, the natural environment, civility, etc.) but majors on private issues like idolatry, personal humility, piety, etc.** This is most evident in the way the Apostles treat stewardship of money. The emphasis is not on how the money is needed to help the poor but rather in how the possession of it tends to corrupt the one who hangs on to it. This is evident also in the way in which the Apostles sighted the Old Testament, and the Gospel record in their guidance of the early church. They focus on the redemptive aspects of reconciliation with God through faith rather than social ethical teaching applied to the general population.
 - d. **Practical long-term agendas for promoting “liberty and justice for all” require serious reflection, debate, and humility realizing that wisdom may not always be popular.** For example, while socialism may seem to initially favor the poor with its

equitable distribution of wealth it may (as history has shown) not always serve the long-term best interests of the poor.

- e. In order for constructive, civil, communication to take place, all parties need to be committed to avoiding: **1) personal attacks, 2) emotional manipulation, 3) closed-minded defensiveness.**
- f. **All need to recognize the value of both private and public moral issues.** While the political right seems to focus on private, personal morality the left focuses on public, social morality.
- g. **Culture is “up stream” from government.** This means that government is the fruit of culture more than the other way around. The institutions that most powerfully shape the culture are: home, church, school, entertainment, and media. Government in a free society also plays a role but more as an enforcer of cultural values. This means that the Christian should focus more attention on forces other than government except to keep government from being used by those who hold values that do not represent the will of the general public.

A. **“Thy Kingdom Come” — “. . . in, but not of the world.” Jn.18:36**

1. H. Richard Niebuhr identified **five ways in which the Christian community has related to secular culture.** I have used the same categories here but with slightly different descriptions.

- a. **CHRIST AGAINST CULTURE — Don’t get involved in an evil world.**

ANABAPTISTS — The Church is to accept a vulnerable posture of relative noninvolvement in the power structures of the world while building an alternative model society within, but distinct from, the broader world context.

- b. **CHRIST OF CULTURE — Go with the flow.**

LIBERALISM — Culture is the place where the hand of God is at work in the world, therefore Christ’s Spirit is in the midst of evolutionary change. The culture is the Kingdom of God. Resurrection = renewal, sin = existential alienation, redemption = liberation, ransom = moral influence.

- c. **CHRIST ABOVE CULTURE — Don’t worry about the mundane world.**

ORTHODOX CHURCHES — The Church as the visible expression of the Kingdom of God, exists pretty much independently of the surrounding culture from which it calls people to God.

- d. **CHRIST AND CULTURE IN PARADOX — Live with a foot in both worlds.**

NEW EVANGELICALS — The Church is to see the world as a giant benevolence project while it teaches secular society the ways of God’s Kingdom.

- e. **CHRIST TRANSFORMING CULTURE — Expect to reform society.**

RECONSTRUCTIONISTS (a branch of the Reformed Protestant tradition) — The Church is to work to bring about the total Christianization of every area of society and thereby usher in a golden age of justice, peace, and prosperity.

HOLY EMPIRE — There is to be a State-sanctioned Church. The Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran models in Europe have been examples of this.

2. **The State’s legitimate, but limited role.**

- a. Promoting **justice and peace**

1. St Augustine (4th cent.) in “The City of God” taught that shalom (peace) is “the tranquillity produced by order” (tranquillitas ordinis).

2. The primary role of the state is not to chase down criminals after the fact but to nurture the tranquillitas ordinis, using its unique powers of coercion to that end.
 - b. Protecting **freedom and opportunity** (majority rule, minority rights)
 - c. Providing **security and order**
3. **The Church's role**
- a. Stay private — **A SPECTATOR**
 1. The Church's interest and power is primarily spiritual, not political.
 3. "My kingdom is not of this world." Jn.18:36
 4. The Church must recognize that its faith and hope are not in political powers. Ps.20:7
"Some boast in chariots, and some in horses; but we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God."
 - b. Build responsible citizens — **A RESOURCE**
 1. The Church's interest and power is personal, not political.
NOTE: For the Christian, the goal in politics is not power, but justice. When the Church seeks and gets political power, it not only deserves the disdain that it gets from the broader public, but it runs the risk of the Gospel of Jesus Christ being held hostage to a political agenda.
 2. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." Matt.22:21
 - c. Support the authority of the State — **A CHAPLAIN**
 1. The Church's interest and power is in upholding the State's legitimate but limited authority and role.
 2. "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." Rom.13:1
"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution: whether to a king as the one in authority; or to governors." I Pet.2:13-14
 - d. Be a renewing force in the State — **A PROPHET**
 1. The Church's interest and power is in being the moral conscience of the State.
 2. "I must obey God rather than man." Acts 5:29
 3. A moral critique of the USA: Note: Love demands that we call our country to live up to its ideals of liberty and justice for all. Hypocrisy is to be exposed.
 - Our love of freedom has often permitted and encouraged moral decadence, materialism, and selfish individualism.
 - Our love of technology has tended to erode traditional values and institutions.
 - Our commitment to capitalism has often resulted in the exploitation of the weak, poor, and minority cultures.
 - Our international self-interest has often destructively manipulated the governments of other countries.
 - Our success has often produced an arrogant attitude.
 - Our unconditional support of Israel against the Palestinians has created a conspicuous hypocrisy.
 4. Recognizing and encouraging virtues that promote liberty and justice are important.

- The USA should be applauded for its system of government, which is respectful of both the dignity and depravity of human nature.
 - The USA should be applauded for its emphasis on human dignity and rights.
 - The USA should be applauded for its generosity in supporting people in need around the world.
 - The USA should be applauded for its commitment to spread freedom and democracy.
 - The USA should be applauded for its willingness to receive and respect people from differing cultures.
- e. **NOTE:** When one of these aspects is emphasized at the expense of the others, both the Church and the State suffer. Illustration:
1. **Anabaptists'** radical separation of Church and State ignores the full responsibility of citizenship in an open democracy.
 2. **Evangelicals'** "behind the scenes only" posture ignores the responsibility of citizenship.
 3. **Civil religion's** support of the status quo does not respect the prophetic function of a church that is separate from the state.
 5. **Roman Catholic, liberal Protestant, and Reconstructionist** wedding of Church and State with respect to moral legislation does not respect the distinct domains of the state and the church.
 6. "Standing together, we work with the state. Standing apart, we witness to the state."

4. What is appropriate moral legislation?

- a. New Testament ethics are specifically prescribed for the Church, not the State (which is NOT a part of the regenerated community of the Spirit).
 1. This means that the Church should discipline false teachers and those who are living in moral rebellion, but the pluralistic State should not necessarily have the same standards.
 2. Just because a moral issue is clear in the N.T., does not mean it is appropriate State legislation — drunkenness, divorce, etc.
- b. Moral legislation in a pluralistic secular society should reflect sensitivity to four questions.
 1. What protects **individual freedom** and choice?
 - a. It should preserve the maximum individual freedom consonant with the integrity of the social order or community.
 - b. It should be slow to act, when other restraints are available.
 - c. It should respect privacy as far as possible.
 - d. It should prescribe a minimal morality only.
 - e. It should avoid harmful side effects (like invasion of privacy or blackmail).
 2. What protects the **general welfare** of the whole of society?
 - a. Government's mandate in regard to legislating morality is limited to matters of public justice and the social order. NOTE: Grace and mercy are mandates to the Church and not the primary concern of the State.
 - b. Some issues that are related to the general welfare of the State — honesty, sanctity of human life and private property, family values, etc.

3. What reflects the **prevailing consensus** of order and civility?
 - a. To be enforceable, a law must have widespread public support and represent a consensual morality.
 - b. Legislation should not be changed with every changing moral mood, since this undermines respect for the law and public order.
4. What projects a **realistic world and life view**? Respect for transcendent authority is needed.
 - c. Some issues that are currently debated:
 1. Legislation that prohibits or limits abortion.
 2. Legislation that prohibits or discourages certain types of sexual expression.
 3. Legislation that sanctions a theistic world and life view (prayer in public schools).

B. **The political implications of Jesus' teaching.**

1. At the heart of Jesus' teaching is the **Golden Rule**. *We are to treat others in the same way we would have them treat us* (Matt.7:13). In many ways the teaching of Jesus has shaped the "democratic republic" system of government that we see in America.
2. The beatitudes (Matt.5:1-12)
 - a. Political philosophy should respect the existence of a rule of **moral law that transcends democratic consensus** but is generally identified by it.
 - b. Political philosophy should respect the importance of **community building**. "Peacemakers" suggests a posture that is active in working for reconciliation between differing perspectives within a community.
 - c. Political philosophy should respect the **depravity of humanity**. "Poor in spirit" suggests a view of human nature that respects its capacity for sin, evil, and abuse in social relationships. It is the opposite of pride or an inflated and idealistic optimism with respect to human nature.
 - d. Political philosophy should be willing to expect personal **suffering for doing what is right** rather than what is self-serving. "Persecuted for righteousness" suggests a willingness to do what is right rather than what is personally profitable in the moment.
3. **A core principle – "Freedom and equality with justice for all."**
 - a. Jesus' teaching was most radical in his day at the point where it announced the radical equality of worth for all humans.
 - b. Especially the poor and powerless, the women, children, and the slave were to be respected and valued.
 - c. Not only were these "least among you" to be valued, they were to be granted the rights that came with such value.
 - d. Political philosophy should **respect the dignity and rights of all people**, especially those who seem weaker, less valuable, and more vulnerable.
4. The parables
 - a. Mark 4:3-9 The soil, and the seed.
 1. Not everyone will understand and not everyone will profit from the truth.
 2. In this world a society must be prepared to live with a mixed response to the truth.
 3. Political philosophy should realize that **utopia will not be experienced** in this life.

- b. The kingdom of heaven parables
 1. Jesus' teaching was not only about the afterlife of heaven but also about the values of the "age to come" that are working in the present world.
 2. Political philosophy should respect the **need for gradual development and process**.

C. **Biblical Teaching On Social Ethics**

1. THE OLD TESTAMENT

- a. Three broad categories of social laws are found.
 1. **The prohibition of idolatry**
 2. **The prohibition of oppression of the poor and the needy**
 - a. **Unlawful usury charges** — Ex.22:25; Lev.25:36
 1. A zero-interest loan must be available to the poor, and if the balance is not repaid by the sabbatical year, it is forgiven. Ex.22:25; Lev.25:35-38; Deut.15:1-11
 2. Israelites who became slaves to repay debts go free in the seventh year. Ex.21:1-11; Lev.25:47-53; Deut.15:12-18
 - b. **Gleaning rights** — Lev.19:9-10; 23:22; 25:5; Deut.23:24-25; 24:19-21
 1. The corners of the fields and dropped fruit were to be left for the poor (widows, orphans, and sojourners) Lev.19:9-10; Deut.24:19-21
 2. Every seventh year, fields must remain fallow, and the poor may reap the natural growth. Ex.23:10-11; Lev.25:1-7
 - c. **Care for the poor:**
 1. The third-year tithe goes to the poor widows, orphans, and sojourners as well as the Levites. Deut.14:28-29; 26:14
 2. Giving brings a blessing — Prov.19:17; Ps.41:1
 3. Oppression brings judgment — Ps.140:12
 4. Cheating, robbing, and coveting are condemned — Hosea 12:7; Micah 2:1-2
 - d. **Care for widows and orphans:**
 1. Warnings concerning affliction — Ex.22:22-23
 2. Taking a widow's garment in pledge is prohibited — Deut.24:17
 3. Forgotten sheaves were to be left for them — Deut.24:19
 4. Third year tithe was to go to them— Deut.26:12-13
 - e. **Care for sojourners (ger):**
 1. Similar to that of Israelites — Ex.22:21; 23:9; Lev.19:33-34; Deut.10:19; Lev.24:22; Lev.19:10; 23:22; Deut.24:19-21; Num.35:15; Josh.20:9; Psalm 94:6; Zech.7:10
 2. They were not included in the general liberation of slaves in the year of Jubilee — Lev.25:45-46
 3. They had no inheritance rights in the land — Ex.12:48
 - f. **Care for foreigners (nokri):**
 1. No intermarriage — Deut.7:1-6; I Kings 11:1-2
 2. Interest could be charged — Deut.23:20
 3. They were not offered the benefits of the Law as were the sojourners.

3. **The prohibition of personal conduct that harms society** (lying, killing, stealing, adultery, etc.)
 - b. An important feature of Old Testament teaching is that the unit of society to which social ethics generally applied was the theocracy, the “covenant community,” not outsiders. This is not to suggest that God’s people had no ethical responsibility to those outside Israel, but rather that the focus was upon the covenant community.
 - c. Israel was to be a priest to the nations (Ex.19:6) and a blessing to the world (Gen.26:24) but it is not clear that the application of Israel’s social standards and values were to stand apart from religious and ceremonial values. While it is clear that God judged some of Israel’s neighboring nations for their social and moral evils, it is not true that they were held to the standards of the Law of Moses as was Israel. God’s people (while in exile) were to work for the peace and prosperity of the pagan culture of their occupation.
Jer.29:7 “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.”
2. THE TEACHING OF JESUS IN THE GOSPELS
- a. Duties **within** the covenant community:
 1. **Concerning poverty:**
 - a. It is an inevitable social phenomenon — Mk.14:7.
 - b. Its existence does not necessarily constitute a call to alleviate it.
 - c. Sacrificial (not showy) giving is commanded — Mk.12:41-44.
 - d. Although the poor are blessed, it is quite desirable to work for self-advancement — Lk.6:20; 19:11-28.
 2. **Concerning wealth:**
 - a. Possessions are not necessarily or intrinsically wrong.
 - b. Riches make it more difficult for a man to enter the Kingdom of God — Matt.19:24.
 - c. A person’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions — Lk.12:15.
 - d. Money is to be used to love and serve others — Lk.16:1-13.
 3. **Concerning general care for others** — Matt.25:31-46.
 - b. Duties to **all** people:
 1. **General principles:**
 - a. We are sent into the world as Christ was sent — Jn.17:15-17; 20:21.
 - b. We are to love our enemies — Lk.6:35.
 - c. We share a common world and spiritual challenge – Acts 17:22-31
 2. **Civil responsibilities:**
 - a. We are to render the civil government its due — Matt.22:21.
 - b. We are to act justly in our personal dealings with the world — Lk.3:11-14.
 3. **Witness responsibilities:**
 - a. Our unity is the basis of our witness — Jn.17:20-21.
 - b. We are called to be salt and light — Matt.5:13-14.
 - c. We are commissioned to make disciples — Matt.28:20; Mk.16:15; Lk.24:47.

NOTE: Luke 10:25-37 (the story of the “good Samaritan”) is a passage that is often misunderstood as a lesson in social ethics. Its more probable purpose is

centered in the lawyer's response to the person of Christ (see the context — vs. 21-24 & 38-42). Jesus' answers to questions often seemed to ignore the question that was asked. Jesus tended to address the "real" question and ignore the superficial question that was on the table. In the story, the man in the ditch represents the lawyer, the outcast Samaritan is the outcast Jesus (who is the neighbor that the lawyer is called to love). When read in this way, we eliminate the apparent lapse in logic between verse 29 and verse 36.

c. **Priorities:**

1. The spiritual over the physical in the personal sphere.
2. Subsistence over justice in the political sphere — Matt.22:21; Lk.12:13-21.
3. Ministry over personal rights — Matt.17:24-27.

d. Again we note that Jesus' ministry and teaching are largely concerned with the **infrastructure of the covenant community** (the Jews). Note the following:

1. The disciples are forbidden to go to the Gentiles — Matt.10:5-8.
2. Jesus' reluctance to minister to the Canaanite woman — Matt.15:21-28.

3. THE TEACHING OF THE APOSTLES

a. Again, the vast majority of the material in Acts and the Epistles is directed toward the inner workings of the Christian community. The frequent use of the phrases "one another," "brethren," "saints," etc. illustrates the point.

1. **I Tim.5:1-16** gives instructions in the care of victims within the church.

There are two basic principles that are stressed.

- a. The family has first responsibility.
- b. The church is to care for those who meet certain criteria.
 1. They do not have family to care for them.
 2. They cannot help themselves.
 3. They show signs of being spiritually responsible.

c. NOTE: Failure to hold to these standards can lead to:

1. Encouraging past delinquent behavior.
2. Tempting people to become irresponsible in the future.

2. **I Cor.5:9-13** suggests that Christians have limited spheres of judgment.

a. Believers are to be tolerant of sinners in the world but not tolerant of unrepentant sinners who claim to be Christians.

1. The sins that Paul has in mind are of the order of that mentioned in (5:1-2) open incest with no apology or conviction of sin.
2. This tolerance does not suggest endorsement but deference to God's judgment.

b. This must be tempered with the obligation to be an activist for the common good that is a responsibility of citizens in a democracy.

1. The motivation for critique of secular culture should be the common good not personal fear.
2. The basis of such a critique must be the common good and reasoned from common sense and natural law (not Christian ethical teaching which is directed to the church).

- b. The teaching of the Apostles concerning the believer's relationship with those outside the covenant community tends to follow many of the same patterns seen in the Old Testament and Gospels. Note five basic categories:
1. **Hospitality to strangers** — Heb.13:2.
 2. **Submission to secular institutions**
 - a. The general rule — I Pet.2:13-18; Eph.6:5-9; Col.3:22-25; Jas.5:1-11; Rom.13; Titus 3:1.
 - b. Some exceptions:
 1. Rendering to God what is due Him — Acts 4:19-21.
 2. Appealing to legal rights to further the gospel — Acts 16:36-39; 25:9-10.
 3. **Separation from the world**
 - a. In moral areas — II Thess.3:6,14-15; I Cor.5:1-13; I Tim.5:20.
 - b. In doctrinal areas — Titus 1:1-13; 3:10; I Tim.1:19-20; II Tim.1:13; 2:25-26; Gal.1:6-9.
 - c. In social areas — II Jn.9-11; II Thess.3:6.
 4. **Spiritual welfare**
 - a. Prayer — I Tim.2:1-4.
 - b. Testimony — I Cor.10:27-29; I Tim.3:7; I Pet.2:11; 3:1-2; Titus 2:6-9.
 - c. Witness — II Cor.5:16-21.
 5. **Physical welfare**
 - a. "Do good to all men . . ." Gal.6:10.
 - b. "Every consideration to all men . . ." Titus 3:1-3.
 - c. "Love toward all men . . ." I Thess.3:12.
 - d. "Not to be in need from . . ." I Thess.4:12.
 - e. "Be patient and seek good . . ." I Thess.5:14-15.
 - f. "Do what is right in the sight of all . . ." Rom.12:17.
 - g. "Overcome evil with good." Rom.12:21.
- c. Believers are called to give attention to **"one another"**.
1. Positive exhortations:
 - wash one another's feet — Jn.13:14
 - love one another — Jn.13:34
 - be devoted to one another in brotherly love — Rom.12:10a
 - give preference to one another in honor — Rom.12:10b
 - be on the same mind toward one another — Rom.12:16; 15:5
 - build up one another — Rom.14:19
 - accept one another — Rom.15:7
 - admonish one another — Rom.15:14
 - greet one another — Rom.16:16; I Cor.16:20
 - wait for one another — I Cor.11:33
 - have the same care for one another — I Cor.12:25
 - through love serve one another — Gal.5:13

- bear one another's burdens – Gal.6:2
 - show tolerance for one another – Eph.4:2
 - be kind to one another – Eph.4:32a
 - forgive one another – Eph.4:32b
 - speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs – Eph.5:19
 - be subject to one another – Eph.5:21
 - regard one another as more important than yourselves – Phil.2:3
 - teach and admonish one another – Col.3:16
 - comfort one another – I Thess.4:18
 - encourage one another – I Thess.5:11a; Heb.3:13
 - build up one another – I Thess.5:11b
 - live in peace with one another – I Thess.5:13
 - seek after that which is good for one another – I Thess.5:15
 - stimulate one another to live and good deeds – Heb.10:24
 - confess your sins to one another – Jas.5:16a
 - pray for one another – Jas.5:16b
 - keep fervent in your love for one another – I Pet.4:8
 - be hospitable to one another – I Pet.4:9
 - use your gifts to serve one another – I Pet.4:10
 - clothe ourselves with humility toward one another – I Pet.5:5
2. Negative exhortations:
- do not judge one another – Rom.14:13
 - do not bite and devour one another – Ga.5:15
 - do not become boastful, challenging one another – Gal.5:26a
 - do not envy one another – Gal.5:26b
 - do not lie to one another – Col.3:9
 - do not speak against one another – Jas.4:11
 - do not complain against one another – Jas.5:9

D. An Evangelical Perspective On Social Change

1. THE NATURE OF MAN'S DILEMMA

a. Man's nature

1. **Dignity** — he is made in God's image (spiritual dimension).
2. **Depravity** — he is separated from God (radically flawed).

b. Man's problems

1. Personal spiritual displacement leads to —
2. Individual delinquency and —
3. Societal disruption.

2. THE NATURE OF MAN'S HOPE

- a. Salvation or reconciliation within society is dependent upon:

1. Reconciliation of **INDIVIDUALS TO GOD** through faith in Christ's substitutionary sacrifice and indwelling Spirit.
2. The proper working of **A COMMUNITY OF SUCH INDIVIDUALS** (the Church) as a microcosm of God's Kingdom on earth (Christ against culture).
3. The effective **EVANGELIZATION** of the larger society (drawing them into the Christian community).
4. Promoting and/or preserving the **JUDEO-CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW** in the larger society.

NOTE:

- a. Full social reform and salvation will come ultimately and only through the establishment of **GOD'S KINGDOM** (in its fullness) on earth at Christ's return.
 - b. The **CHURCH OF CHRIST ON EARTH IS TO BE A MICROCOSM** and share the values of that coming Kingdom. But because the Church is imperfect, so is its reflection of God's order.
 - c. All attempts at resolving man's problems apart from the above pattern are superficial and futile. Social, political, and economic manipulation is nothing more than a **STOP-GAP MEASURE** and will not succeed (ultimately) without the personal reconciliation of individuals to God in Christ.
 - d. Steps to reform or conserve secular policy and values are aimed at accomplishing two things:
 1. **Creating and/or preserving an environment** where the Church of Christ can carry out (with the least interference) its tasks of exemplifying Kingdom values (modeling a new order) and evangelizing the world. This is best done in a society where the government is benevolently neutral with respect to evangelical Christianity and embraces and supports a world and life view (concept of ultimate reality) that is consistent with that of the historical Judeo-Christian traditions.
 2. **Creating and/or preserving a system of law and order** that respects reality (as evangelicals see it):
 - a. A basically pessimistic view of man's ability to completely escape his depravity. (A republic is preferable to a democracy when speaking of morals and values.)
 - b. An emphasis upon individual freedom and responsibility. (Any real improvement must start with individuals.)
 - c. Necessary stop-gap measures of social manipulation for the sake of social justice, mercy, and protection of minorities.
 - d. Basic moral values are derived from a Judeo-Christian base.
3. **What is the sphere of social action?**
- a. The dynamics of **Christian community** — the local church as a family (shared resources, emotional support).
 - b. The dynamics of **personal piety** — the individual believer and his neighbors (help pay bills or rent).
 - c. The dynamics of the Kingdom of God in **secular society** — organized structural reform (lobby, letter, lecture).

NOTE: Evangelicals tend to be committed to social action in the above order of priority for three reasons:

1. They believe that real change begins with the spiritual renewal of individuals, not with manipulating social systems.
2. They believe that the Church stands as an alternative model over and against secular culture.
3. They believe that manipulation of social systems is but a stop-gap measure.

4. A philosophy of economic justice

- a. Three principles in the distribution of wealth within the covenant community:
 1. To each according to the person's merit or demerit (II Thess.3:10).
 2. To each according to a standard of equality (II Cor.9:13-15).
 3. To each according to a person's need (Acts 4:34-35).
- b. It was the general understanding of the founders of the American Republic that the government was responsible for JUSTICE, not LOVE or MERCY (which sprang from the free choice of individuals and groups in society).
- c. What is difficult to assess is the degree to which JUSTICE includes "1," "2," and "3" (above) and/or the degree to which they are expressions of MERCY and LOVE.
- d. Is capitalism contrary to Christian ethics? Many would argue that it is not.
 1. Capitalism makes people behave better than they otherwise would. It **civilized greed**, just as marriage civilized sexual desire.
 2. Capitalism **channels greed** in such a way that it is placed in the service of the wants of others.
 3. Capitalism is not the problem but rather it is the failure of our social institutions (church, school, civic groups, etc.) to promote successfully the Judeo-Christian worldview, which acts as **a check on democratic polity, and a free market economy**.
 4. Capitalism as an expression of **human freedom** provides a platform for genuine virtue in that all generosity is freely offered and not forced.
- e. Others would argue that technology and capitalism, while making society more materially prosperous, have undermined the spiritual values.
 1. Creativity in the pursuit of material growth (in a free market) tends to ignore and attack all that is tradition in a **slash and burn** manner.
 2. Capitalism fosters a **hedonistic consumer** feeding frenzy that is materialistic, short sighted (get rich or satisfied now) and self oriented.
 3. Technological capitalism in drawing women away from the home has been **damaging to the family**.
 4. Technological capitalism has **ignored or attacked Protestant Christianity** and local self-government both of which served to restrain human appetites.
- f. Entrepreneurs are doing more than anyone else to fulfill the Bible's practical mandate to improve the living standards, and the dignity, of the disadvantaged.
- g. The rich are no more materialistic than the poor and in many cases less so.
- h. The moral behavior of the poor on most fronts does not suggest that they are morally superior to the rich. The contrary seems to be true. **Poverty has a positive correlation with many negative social behaviors.**

5. Modern views of social justice reviewed

- a. Various theories of social justice and their chief concerns
 1. **Libertarianism** – maximize individual freedom.
 2. **Utilitarianism** – maximize the efficiency of production.
 3. **Merit based** – maximize the contribution (work, wisdom, and will) / reward of the individual.
 4. **Welfare based** – maximize the general welfare of all people.
 5. **Resource equality based** – maximize the equal opportunity for each individual.
 6. **Result equality based** – maximize the equal distribution (outcome) of goods and services to each individual.
 7. **Justice as fairness** – (see “e” below)
- b. The birth of the modern concept of social justice coincided with:
 1. “Death of God” theology with the rise of science and reason.
 - a. In the past, economic inequality could be ascribed to “God’s blessing or lack thereof”. But there seemed to be little direct correlation between moral merit and economic gain.
 - b. This is viewed as evidence that God is not a reality.
 - c. The unresolved problem of evil becomes a stumbling block to faith for many.
 2. The rise of the ideal of a command economy – scientific socialism.
 - a. When God is no longer a factor, the inequalities of life are intolerable and must be viewed as correctable by manipulating the economic and social systems.
 - b. There is a deep impulse among intellectuals to explain any difference in “natural God given” ability (which enable the production of personal wealth) as products of nurture and environment (the system).
 - c. The result = any inequality in the ultimate distribution of wealth and power is the fault of the system not the result of inborn individual ability or ambition.
- c. Responsibility (in many modern views) moves away from the individual (victim) to the corporate system through a “social contract” or agreement of how the system works.
- d. Social justice rightly understood is a specific habit of justice that is “social “ in two senses.
 1. The means of justice is a community of conscience where individuals work for what is good, fair, consistent with the truth.
 2. The goal is the good of the community not just the individual.

Note: It is ideologically neutral.
- e. The contribution of John Rawls (Harvard professor of ethics) is seen in his “**Justice as Fairness**” which is a form of “**social contract**” theory. Rawls’ work is the base line for much of the current discussion of liberal social justice in secular circles.
 1. He recognized and rejected “traditional” (religious) systems of justice because so often they were unfair in the eye of “common sense.” The view of slaves as property is one example.
 2. He starts with what he calls the “**original principle**” which asks us to think in a hypothetical, objective, and impersonal way about the answer to this simple question – What is in my (along with others) rationally informed best interest?

3. His “**second principle**” suggests that government should have the power to promote the following two ideals.
4. His theory rested on two ideals:
 - a. **Equal liberty for all** – Each person must have access to “common” liberties shared by all others in the community. These liberties should realistically enable a person to govern their own destiny and offer access to all positions of power. We might call this “Equal opportunity under the law.”
 - b. **Respect for differences** – Those who are advantaged (by nature or nurture) are given special access to power and privilege only insofar as they care for the “least” advantaged. In other words, the privileged are to use their position for the common good. We might call this “Responsibility for the common good.”
5. Rawls believes justice is fairness, and through the social contract model, he theorizes that when individuals produce social goods cooperatively--not for individual consumption--there will be enough goods for everyone. But when individuals compete for those goods, the problem of ‘distributive justice’ arises, hence, the ‘difference principle,’ a principle that redistributes inequalities justly to the greatest advantage of everyone. When these inequalities are redistributed, this redistribution must occur in the ‘original position of the social contract,’ a position where individuals make rational decisions to further self-interest based on conditions of fairness.
- f. Two contrasting perspectives that are philosophically incompatible but have each had a role in shaping modern American culture.

<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
Based on “natural law” theory	Based on “social justice” theory
Inspired the American Revolution	Inspired the French Revolution
Gov. control is minimized	Gov. control is maximized
Equality = (of opportunity) human worth and legal rights	Equality = (of results) access to the blessings of goods & services
Rights are discovered (religious tradition)	Rights are invented (social contract)

6. **The Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (1974) offered the following guidelines for social responsibility.**
 - a. Share God’s concern for Justice. Isa.1:17 “Seek justice, correct oppression.”
 - b. Share God’s Concern for Reconciliation.
 - c. Share God’s Concern for Liberation of Men from Every Kind of Oppression.
 - d. Respect the Dignity of Every Person.
 - e. Exploit No One.
 - f. Serve Every Person.
 - g. Denounce Evil and Injustice.
 - h. Seek to Exhibit the Righteousness of the Kingdom of Christ.
 - i. Seek to Spread the Righteousness of the Kingdom of Christ.

E. Conclusions

1. Love cares.
 - a. Love is not cost effective.
 - b. Love longs to express itself in tangible ways.
 - c. Love is most dramatic when it is not deserved.
 - d. Love is more than sentimentality.
2. Social justice is not the most important objective in my call to follow Christ.
 - a. This world is not our blessed hope.
 - b. Social justice within the context of the covenant community is the Biblical emphasis.
 - c. Much of Jesus' social service was a sign.
3. Pain and injustice are not always the enemy.
 - a. We reap what we sow and learn from our mistakes.
 - b. We find our hope in God when all the toys are gone.
 - c. We are to welcome and share the suffering of Christ.
4. The dignity of the poor, vulnerable, and weak are a priority.
 - a. The needs of the poor take priority over the wants of the rich.
 - b. The freedom of the dominated take priority over the liberty of the powerful.
 - c. The participation of the marginalized groups takes priority over the preservation of an order which excludes them.
5. The danger of government imposed social justice.

“It is one of the greatest weaknesses of our time that we lack the patience and faith to build up voluntary organizations for purposes which we value highly, and immediately ask the government to bring about by coercion (or with means raised by coercion) anything that appears as desirable to large numbers. Yet nothing can have a more deadening effect on real participation by the citizens than if government, instead of merely providing the essential framework of spontaneous growth, becomes monolithic and takes charge of the provision for all needs, which can be provided for only by the common effort of many.” Friedrich Hayek

F. My personal Application

1. I commit myself to civil, constructive, and humble dialogue with others who share my concerns for social justice and compassion but have different priorities and strategies.
 - a. It is important to respect the complexity of dealing with social problems where there can be many different approaches to solving the same problem.
 - b. It is important to be able to compromise on non-core values to effectively address social problems.
 - c. It is important to major on majors as a part of a Christian witness.
2. I commit myself to support robust economic growth that is accessible to the lower and middle classes.
 - a. The best support for the poor comes from increasing opportunities of self-help in the creation of wealth through opportunity for jobs and small business.
 - b. Tax laws that encourage the release of capital for the creation of jobs and new business can be an important factor in growing the economy.

- c. Laws are needed that will insure that the lower and middle classes have access to the benefits of a growing economy.
3. I commit myself to insure that the weak, vulnerable, and marginalized of society are treated with respect and given an opportunity to help themselves.
 - a. I realize that the poor among us are often powerless and voiceless in the social systems that shape our common life.
 - b. I must be an advocate for them and work to create opportunities for their voice to be heard and respected.
 - c. I am committed to creating opportunity for self help not necessarily equality of result (which would demand violation of personal freedoms).
 - d. I must be careful not to promote a culture of dependence, entitlement, or slothfulness.
 - e. I must support the need for a social safety net that will give aid to those who cannot help themselves.
4. I commit myself to live well below my means so that I have resources to give to others.
 - a. Discipline of appetites is a key to character development and the encouragement of others to live responsibly.
 - b. I will save for future emergencies but be just as committed to saving for benevolent giving.
 - c. I will set my goal to give at a level that will reduce my taxes to "0". (Excluding housing expenses.) or to give 50% of my income away each year.
 - d. I will keep cash on hand for unexpected opportunities to give to people's needs.
 - I will error on the side of being naive rather than stingy.
 - I will ask hard questions in deciding where to give.
 - I will bear witness to Christ in my giving.
5. I will not judge others for their spending and giving practices.
 - a. I will lead by example.
 - b. I will teach Biblical principles of stewardship.
 - c. I will encourage people to take risks of faith.

Questions that you should be able to answer.

- 1. Specific facts you should know.**
 - a. What are some of the different ways in which we can see Christ relating to culture?
 - b. What kinds of roles does the church play in a secular state?
- 2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.**
 - a. What is the role of the state and how is it limited?
 - b. What constitutes appropriate moral legislation?
 - c. How would you summarize the Biblical teaching on social ethics?
 - d. What is the nature of our hope for America?
- 3. Questions you should wrestle with.**

- a. What are the principles of a Christian philosophy of social change?
- b. How important is economic justice to a Biblical philosophy of social change?