The Motivational Foundation for Executing the “Four Core” Areas: Biblical Justice and Righteousness

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Introduction

Many have sought to embark on purposes and missions that may be deemed “worthy causes” in cities and societies, without endurance and sustainability. What could be the primary reason(s) for such cessation or half-fulfillment of goals? Scripture informs us that “a house built on sand” will not endure but one built on “a solid foundation – the rock” will endure! In the words of Jesus: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock” (Matthew 7:24 NASB).

Rod Thompson (2004) made the following comment: “The most important single factor in the formation of Christian worldview is our immersion in the Scriptures.” It is the lens of Scripture that will give clarity to our purpose, drive to our execution, and sustainability in our mission because it is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and God-empowered. Our foundation, therefore, for doing “social justice” work in Oklahoma City must be the bedrock, the anchor, and the plumb line of the “Word of God.” At the very core of Scripture is the revelation of the heart of God for “Justice and Righteousness” within any nation (hence… every city in every nation). Let’s examine the heart and desire of God with respect to social justice toward humanity.

A Brief Understanding of Biblical “Justice and Righteousness”

In the biblical narrative there are two significant events that the poets, prophets, and authors consistently point to in understanding God’s heart of justice. The first is the Exodus liberation event, and the second is the coming of Jesus Christ for all humanity’s emancipation (Marshall, 2005). “Justice and Righteousness” is the most frequently recurring topic in the Bible. The Hebrew and Greek words for “justice and righteousness” (mishpat, sedeqah, diskaiosune, krisis) occur over 1000 times in Scripture. The biblical concept of “justice and righteousness” is much more comprehensive than our current western understanding (fairness, rights, equality, etc.) because it touches on every aspect of life – the personal, the social, the public, the private, the political, the religious, the human, and the nonhuman. In Biblical usage, particularly in the Hebrew Bible, “justice (mishpat) and righteousness (sedeqah)” occur as a word-pair with virtually no variation in meanings:

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream (Amos 5:24 - NRSV)
Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice (Ps. 72:1-2 - NRSV).

Biblically, the term “righteousness” is the expression of the idea for doing “justice,” hence their coupling. So in essence, one can be said to be righteous when one is crucially and essentially involved and in the forefront of doing works of social justice. The Biblical essence of doing “justice” is to right what has gone wrong, and to restore things to a condition of “rightness” (Marshall, 2005). Notice the prophet’s injunction and warning to King Jehoiakim:

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages; who says, “I will build myself a spacious house with large upper rooms,” and who cuts out windows for it paneling it with cedar, and painting it with vermilion. Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? Says the LORD (Jer. 22:13-16 - NRSV).

The holistic concept of “justice” embodies works and attitudes of compassion (Lupton, 2007), graciousness, and mercy, for that is the essence of God and represents His heart:

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!” (Is. 30:18 - NRSV)

God’s Representatives must be Agents of “Justice and Righteousness”

The nation’s cities need God-representatives! The poor, needy, pregnant unwed mothers, foster children, and the homeless need the expression of “justice and righteousness” toward them (Corbett & Fikkert, 2009). For their cry is no different than many others before our time: (Is. 59:9-17 - NRSV)

So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like dead. We all growl like bears; we moan mournfully like doves; for deliverance, but it is far away. So justice is driven back and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter.

The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; So his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head...

God’s actions to liberate the oppressed and suffering of society should be our motivating model to do likewise (Nash, 2002). Our motivation to do “justice and righteousness” does not come from any
real or perceived need(s) in city or country, but from our knowledge about the very nature and heart of God. Since “justice and righteousness” form the very cornerstone of God’s essential nature, it must become the ROCK UPON WHICH WE STAND to embark on our mission and purpose to sustainably impact our city.

References


