

Sherman Bible Position Paper
The Unique and Narrow Focus of the Church

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Introduction

The church was birthed by God, for His own purposes and for His own glory. The church then is not free to establish her own identity and purpose. Instead, she is to be obedient to what God has declared and commanded. Thus, we see in the Scriptures that the church as an institution has a very specific and narrow focus. Yes, the church's purpose is grand and eternal beyond compare, yet it is narrow in focus and scope. Extreme clarity on the church's purpose allows the church to faithfully pursue that purpose undistracted and unhindered by anything else. This narrow focus allows the church to obey the Lord in making disciples, who then go out into the world and faithfully obey God in what He calls them to do. The purpose of Sherman Bible Church is to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ through gospel-centered teaching, gospel-centered worship, gospel-centered community, and gospel-centered mission.

We begin with the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. Then we examine how the two great mandates from God work together. With clarity on the church's commission, we look at the differences between the God-given authority granted to the state and that which is granted to the church. It is especially critical to discern the differences between how the church as an institution vs. the church as individuals are to function. The marks of the true church are not only important to identify but are essential for the church herself to prioritize above all else.

The Gospel

God, the Creator and Sovereign Ruler over all the universe, holds all created beings accountable to His law (Romans 1:18-2:29). While He is both loving and compassionate, He is also holy and just. His holiness and justice demand proper worship and perfect righteousness. Mankind, created by God in His own image, has rebelled against God since the very first man (Adam). Therefore, all mankind has since been born with a sinful nature, is spiritually dead and therefore separated from God, is deserving of God's judgment and wrath, and is helpless to save himself. The devastating news at this point is that unrighteous man stands condemned by a holy God.

Into this hopeless situation, God sent a savior – Jesus, God the Son, who is completely God and completely man (Luke 1:35, John 1:1-18). Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, thus He was born free from the original sin nature of Adam. Jesus fulfilled the law of God perfectly, and willingly offered Himself as an atoning sacrifice for all those whom He had chosen from eternity past, who by grace through faith in Him would be saved from sin and accounted righteous by God. (Luke 4:13, John 8:29, 1 Peter 2:22, Hebrews 4:15, Romans 5:18-19, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 3:18). Jesus took upon Himself the wrath of God the Father which was due to the

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elect. Jesus powerfully resurrected from the dead, thus making it possible for God to justify (declare righteous) unrighteous men who would trust in His sacrifice for them on the cross. God's verdict of "righteous" upon those who believe in Jesus is apart from the keeping of the law, so that those who were guilty and condemned in their sin are declared innocent and righteous through faith in Christ. Salvation is available to man by God's grace alone through faith alone. Man's response to this gracious good news is to repent of his sin, and believe in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

This gospel is to be proclaimed to everyone, to those who have not yet believed, and to those who have already believed, for it is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16). The gospel is not only for justification, but also transformation. It is not only for the forgiveness of sins but also the changing of people's hearts into worshippers of God, and into a community of faith. This community then moves outward in actions of love for God and others. The gospel is news that must be explicitly proclaimed and can only be believed through Spirit-given faith. It is through the preaching of the gospel that the Holy Spirit creates, grows, and nourishes the church. The ordinary methods of God are, as seen in the church in Acts 2:42-47, gospel-centered teaching, gospel-centered worship, gospel-centered community, and gospel-centered mission. The gospel creates the church and the church protects and proclaims the gospel.

Two Mandates

There are two great mandates which God has given to the Church; the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Three huge errors continue to manifest themselves with regard to these two God-given mandates. First, the Great Commandment is confused with the Great Commission, or the two mandates are combined in such a way that they are indistinguishable. Second, the Great Commandment is emphasized to the exclusion or assumption of the Great Commission. Third, the Great Commission is elevated such that the Great Commandment is ignored. All of these errors have disastrous effects; thus, the church must maintain a proper understanding of both mandates as God intended.

The Great Commission is a commission Jesus has given to the church. The Great Commission is not for everyone, only the church. Jesus has not commissioned the world to go and make disciples of Himself. He has commissioned the church. Not only has the message been revealed to the church, He has also specified the methods of making disciples. The gospel is a report that is to be announced and subsequently believed rather than a task for the church to fulfill; the gospel needs heralds, ambassadors, witnesses. The Great Commission is the task that is to be fulfilled, namely, to proclaim the gospel.

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The Great Commission does not tell the church to solve all the world's problems. The Great Commission does not speak to marriages, or raising children, or poverty, or a whole host of everyday issues. The Great Commission is very specific. The goal of the Great Commission is to glorify God by making disciples through proclamation of the gospel. The book of Acts is a record of the early church carrying out this commission - see specifically Acts 2:42-47, 6:7; 17:10-12.

In contrast to the Great Commission, the Great Command is a summary of the law. Jesus boiled the entire law down to loving God and loving people. The Great Command is for every single person, believer or nonbeliever; no one is excluded. Unlike the gospel which has to be announced to everyone, the Great Command has already been given to everyone inwardly, as God holds everyone accountable (Romans 1:18-32). In everyday life, the Great Command is enforced in the natural within the God-given institutions of the family unit, and within society through the government. The Great Command requires that good works be directed to our neighbors. These good works do not earn salvation. When the gospel is believed, the fruit of such faith is disciples fulfilling the Great Command in their ordinary callings – parent, child, employee, employer, citizen – for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Thus, the Great Commission is the mandate to make disciples through gospel proclamation, and the Great Command is the mandate that defines how these disciples are to live. It is essential to maintain the appropriate distinctions without minimizing either mandate. We are not saved by good works, but we were saved for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). The gospel does not relieve disciples from obeying God's commands, but instead propels disciples outward to love their neighbors.

The Church and the State

Knowing the differences between the Great Commission and Great Commandment allows us to see more clearly the distinctive roles of the church and state. The church and the state are two distinct ways in which God operates in the world. Through the state God operates by providence, and through the church God operates by the empowering and direction of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. God has delegated authority to the state (Luke 20:25; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17) and given it the "power of the sword" to enforce its authority. The church is not over the state, nor is the state over the church. The state is to maintain peace and follow biblical principles in civil matters. God's moral law is to be codified in laws, and written into constitutions, etc. In contrast, the gospel is an announcement, good news, that justifies sinners, and sanctifies them through the creation of a new heart and a renewed mind – thus, the gospel is not law, nor can it be turned into law.

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Unlike the state, the church does not have authority to discipline the world. Instead, the church has been given authority to affirm, oversee, shape and discipline the members within the church (Acts 2:41; Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 1:28; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Matthew 18:15-20). In addition, submission to the church is where disciples of Jesus exercise their submission to Christ in concrete ways. An example of these distinct roles can be found in Titus 3; verses 1-2 pertaining to the state, and verses 3-11 pertaining to the church.

While the state does have the power of the sword to back up its laws, the church does not have access to any temporal power to accomplish its commission. The church has been entrusted with the gospel, a message with a defined, albeit limited, script – a script that cannot be altered. As ambassadors, the people of the church are not the authors of the script, nor can they edit it. They are sent to proclaim it on the authority of God who sent them even while they live uprightly as citizens within the state.

Church as Institution and Church as People

It is important to distinguish between the church as the institute (or unified organism) and the church as individual disciples, the people of God. The church as an institution cannot do everything that the church as individual disciples can do. The church as an institution cannot say whatever she wants. The church as an institution must proclaim the Word of God, not only the Law, but especially the gospel (Romans 8:3-4, 1 Corinthians 1:23). These two components of the Word of God must not be confused, nor is one elevated to the neglect of the other. The Word of God is what the church as an institution proclaims and thus binds the conscience of the church as individuals to the revealed will of God (2 Timothy 4:1-2). It follows then that the church as an institution does not have the authority to bind her individual members' consciences in matters beyond the scope of scripture (Luke 11:46).

For example, the church as an institution cannot bind people to a particular vocation, but it can, and is obligated, to bind people's conscience to the Word of God which tells them how they should conduct themselves in their vocations. In a similar way, the people, whether inside the church or outside, cannot try to bind (or hold responsible) the church as an institution to anything except what the church is already bound to, which is the Word of God with its mandate, the Great Commission to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).

The church as an institution is given the task of gospel-centered teaching, all the while guiding the people of God into worship while they are being formed into a gospel-centered community. It is out of this gospel-centered community that the church as individual disciples fulfill their daily callings, loving God and loving people. If the church is distracted from this all-important formation process, or if there is drift from the purity

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of the gospel, God is not glorified, disciples are not made and ultimately the Great Commission is not followed.

When the local church is faithfully fulfilling the Great Commission, God is glorified, and disciples of Jesus are made – disciples who have been justified and are being formed to fulfill the Great Command. These disciples will use their spiritual gifts within the church and will share the gospel with others as they faithfully live out their station in life. The gospel creates the church, the church protects and proclaims the gospel, and individual disciples are sent out to obey everything Jesus commanded.

Marks of the True Church

God's written word indicates two absolutely essential marks of the true church, summarized as Word and ordinance. Now clearly there are other characteristics that can be included in a list, but these two are the foundational minimum, as the others rest and flourish only on this firm bedrock. The ministry entrusted to the church is also the source of the church's own existence and identity – God's Word and ordinance.

The first mark of the true church is the Word and specifically the preaching of the Gospel (Matthew 4:17; Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Corinthians 1:23). In other words, a true church is marked by the faithful preaching of the Word of God – the law that reveals guilt, and the gospel that God uses to justify and renew (Romans 8:3-4). Faith comes from hearing the Word of Christ (Romans 10:14-17). Through the Word of Christ, the Spirit creates faith in Christ, and where this is present, there is the church. Preaching most directly brings God's Word to His people. The Word of God is working and ruling, saving and teaching and sanctifying. The Word is the appointed means by which the Spirit imparts illumination, faith, awakening, regeneration, purification, and so on. The Word not only describes salvation, it conveys it.

The second mark of the true church is the faithful administration of the two ordinances that Jesus explicitly and personally instituted: baptism and the Lord's supper (Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The substance is the same for both: the promise of forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit because of Jesus Christ's person and work. Through the ordinary elements of the water of baptism, and the bread and wine of the Lord's supper, God assures us of His promises. These are signs and testimonies of God's will toward His people. The Spirit creates faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel and affirms this faith by the use of the ordinances. Thus, God brings about spiritual effects through meager physical means as we obey His commands in baptism and the Lord's supper.

As Word and ordinance are the true marks of the church, then of course this is what the Church is to give herself to. Again, this is prominent in the Great Commission: and

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Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Conclusion

The purpose of Sherman Bible Church is to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ through gospel-centered teaching, gospel-centered worship, gospel-centered community, and gospel-centered mission. The church exists by God and for God and His glory. Thus, the needs of believers or non-believers are not the determining factors for the church – God and His glory are. In other words, the church is God-centered and not man-centered. As a church, we are charged to speak and do the will of God. While there may be those who criticize such a singular focus to proclaim the gospel, it is the power of God, and this is the way that God has prescribed. While there may be those who criticize the church by saying she is not doing enough, the church must continue to trust God. His ordinary ways, characterized by Word and ordinance, are what He will use to accomplish His purposes. A church that is faithful to obey Jesus’ commission will see disciples formed that will go out into the world to carry out justice, extend compassion, meet material needs, and protect the vulnerable, often in their ordinary callings of life. When the church obeys God’s plan, God is glorified, disciples experience joy, and the Great Command is carried out.

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Appendix A – Widows Case Study

In the Word of God, widows, orphans and sojourners – people without husband, parents, or home – are valued for being created in the image of God and are to be provided special care and protection. This concern is exemplified in God Himself (Exodus 22:22-24), who also through the prophets rebuked the Israelites for exploiting those in need (Isaiah 1:17). God instructed individuals – not the centralized place of worship – to care for the widows, orphans, and sojourners, as evidence in Deuteronomy 24:19-22 (see also Deuteronomy 26:12-13).

In 1 Timothy 5, Paul instructs Timothy on the proper care for widows within the church. Paul gave very specific guidelines. The church is to honor (this would include material provision) widows who are indeed widows (v. 3), and further clarifies other qualifications (v. 5; 9-15). These qualifications were both material and spiritual. The care for destitute and godly widows did indeed fall within the scope of the church's provisions. But if the widow has family, they are to support her (and not the church as an institution), reasons being that they repay parents (v. 4), to please God (v.4), to express and not deny the faith (v.8), and to relieve the church as an institution (v.16).

Why all the details and qualifications? So that the church may not be burdened (v. 16)! Note, this is not a set of instructions for the church to care for the widows of the world, but rather is a targeted obligation to care for the widows only within the church. But even within the group of widows, there was a further narrowing of those who fit the qualifications for ministry of the church as an institution. The church must not be burdened, which could happen if the church as an institution was held responsible for all the widows within the church, let alone all the widows within the world. Thus, it was possible for the church to be unnecessarily burdened even in such a noble task of caring for widows.

So, is the church to turn a blind eye to all other widows in need? This is where recognizing the distinction of the church as an institution versus the church as individual disciples is important. The church as an institution must not be burdened, for it has the all-important mandate to preach the gospel. If anything hinders that proclamation, the ministry of Word and ordinance, then there is no other institution who can pick up the slack. Why? Because God has given this mandate to the church and the church alone. But note God's design: as the church functions the way God commands by proclaiming the gospel, disciples are made. The church as an institution, by teaching the whole counsel of God, will teach the disciples to look out for and not ignore those in need. These same disciples, having been renewed and in the process of being sanctified in the gospel, are propelled outward to love their neighbors, which includes needy widows. God is glorified, and the disciples' joy is full as they simply do their "next" in obeying the will of God. Note the beauty that these same disciples can work alongside others to this end, believers and nonbelievers, as this serves the

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common good – which is God’s common grace in action. The church is not burdened but protected in order to fulfill the great commission, and the needs of widows are met, God is glorified, and the disciples’ joy is increased.

Just as it is wrong for the church as an institution to bind people’s conscience to something outside the Word of God, it is wrong for people, within or outside the church, to try to bind the church to something outside its commission. Thus, the world cannot hold the church responsible for all the widows (or orphans or sojourners) of the world, for God does not; but God does hold every single person responsible. The church is held responsible for proclaiming the gospel, and then caring for her own as is fitting. Individual disciples are then able and energized by the gospel, without fear of future punishment of the law, to fulfill the law in loving their neighbors. Note, the “next” for individual disciples does not obligate the church to that same “next.”

For Sherman Bible Church, the outflow of gospel-centered community is mutual service (what one gives) and support (what one receives) among our members. Members who are in need will naturally receive support by the service of those members nearest them. These nearest are then simply doing their “next,” which is gospel-centered mission. Since Sherman Bible Church’s gospel-centered community is comprised of a diverse number of discipleship groups, service will come quickly, efficiently, and personally from the needy member’s discipleship group. This type of service never replaces God’s preferred and designed method of family of origin supporting those within that family unit – for it is a command of God. God has also provided the church the gift of the office of deacon. Sherman Bible Church’s deacons have met the biblical qualifications and have been set apart to address physical needs in our church, either directly or through administering a larger system of assistance. This God given office allows the office of eldership to focus on their God-given responsibilities of Word, prayer and church governance.

Appendix B – Parachurch and the Church

Since this is not always acknowledged, it must be stated that a parachurch is not the church nor is a parachurch officially a part of the church. The two must never be confused nor substituted for one another. The standard definition of a parachurch is an organization, based in or on Christian values that pursues its mission outside the authority of the church. The suffix “para” means beside or alongside. Without discounting the validity of parachurches, it is noted that parachurches are not mentioned in the Bible. While SBC elders are not a fan of the term “parachurch” and would prefer another designation, we use it presently as a culturally relevant term with the following meaning: the parachurch is an organization outside the church that is working alongside of the church for the glory of God by protecting, providing, pointing to and assisting Christ’s church.

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Organizations that seek to meet specific community needs are valuable and beneficial, as they are in the flow of God's common grace. They are examples of humans (disciples and non-disciples of Jesus) gathering together to ensure that the command of loving one's neighbor is put into action. Parachurch organizations can be extremely beneficial. For example, in societal issues in which the church has not been commissioned to address (and most likely not equipped as well), disciples of Jesus can come together to address those issues in a way that demonstrates love toward God and love toward neighbors. Individual disciples of Jesus are called to do many things that the church, as an institution, is not called to do. Recall that the church as an institution makes disciples of Jesus through the Word and ordinances, and then disciples go into the world to live out God's will.

As stated earlier, parachurch organizations are completely separate from churches. How exactly are they different? Here are a few of the prominent differences:

- The church was instituted by Jesus Christ, parachurches are not.
- Scripture repeatedly stresses the importance of Christ's church.
- Church governance has been uniquely delegated to elders.
- The church is officially tasked with the Great Commission, parachurches are not.
- Parachurches are not authorized to make disciples of Jesus Christ. But parachurches should assist the church in the fulfillment of the church's mandate.
- Jesus personally and explicitly instituted the two ordinances – baptism and communion - in the church. Parachurches are not authorized to administer the ordinances.
- Churches have the authority to ordain, parachurches do not.
- The office of deacon has been given to the church.
- Parachurches have not been authorized like the church to carry out spiritual discipline.

An insightful article has been presented that outlines nine essential marks of an authentic parachurch (<https://www.9marks.org/article/journalnine-marks-healthy-parachurch-ministry/>). The list of marks is comprehensive. SBC elders recommend the article to any parachurch organization. What we present below is our brief list of clarifications.

1. Parachurches, as by definition, are to come alongside local churches. We define the phrase "coming alongside" to mean to protect, to provide, to point to and assist the church. By protecting, providing, pointing to and assisting the church, parachurch organizations can help the church fulfill her utterly unique and God-given purpose – for the church must remain steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

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2. Parachurches must have a thorough understanding of the church (ecclesiology) as well as of itself and must always maintain those distinctions. A parachurch must never attempt to replace or serve as a substitute for Christ's church. Nor must a church detract herself from fulfilling her purpose in an attempt to substitute as a parachurch.
3. Parachurches are not over the church, nor is the church over parachurches. While parachurches are not responsible to churches, individual volunteers and staff within a parachurch are still responsible and accountable to their church as members of it.
4. Parachurches must not draw people or resources away from Christ's church, especially through messaging or promoting that, explicitly or implicitly, portrays parachurch as a substitute for Christ's church. This also means that the accomplishment of the mission must not be at the expense of the church.

Appendix C – Social Justice, the Gospel and the Church

It is paramount to remember and understand why Jesus came to earth, which is explicit in the gospel. Paul summarized it this way to Timothy: "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Timothy 1:15). Note, Jesus' mission was not social justice. If so, He would have bypassed the cross and instead would have delivered the Jews from the oppressive rule of the Romans. Jesus was more than capable of leading the greatest social justice mission. Jesus' mission and what He offers is freedom from the oppression of sin and death and evil forces, and foremost, deliverance from the ultimate justice due every single person, the wrath of God.

It is also crucially important to know and understand Jesus as He is, that is, as He has been revealed in the Scriptures. Jesus was extremely compassionate and merciful, and served while He was on this earth. We see this in His life episodes recorded for us, as well as the overarching summary that He perfectly fulfilled the law. However, we cannot twist and pervert who Jesus is and what He did to fit paradigms that man has now undertaken – we do not get to tell Jesus who He is and what He should do. Here are a few examples to consider:

- Jesus, despite the imprisonment of John the Baptist, continued preaching the gospel (Matthew 11:1-6) rather than visit John and seek his release.
- Jesus allowed His body to be anointed with expensive perfume rather than allow it to be sold and the money given to the poor (Matthew 26:6-13).
- Jesus commended Mary for doing nothing while communing with Him while He rebuked Martha for busyness (Luke 10:38-42).
- Jesus fed 5000, but later warned, "...Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life..." (John 6:26-27).

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- Jesus waited and allowed Lazarus to die from his illness (John 11:5-6), His purposes were more important than healthcare.

Jesus' love and compassion were off the charts, but they did not obligate Jesus to pursue every need because man says it is right. Also, as stated earlier, man does not get to tell Jesus who He should be or what He needs to do. In a similar fashion, the church is to be like Christ, and overflowing in love and compassion. However, this does not obligate the church to do what man tells her she ought to do. Man does not get to tell the church who she is and what she is to do. The church is obligated to Christ to declare the gospel to the world, and call everyone to repent and believe in Him. In carrying out that task, the church is obeying God by declaring the gospel which saves man from the wrath of God; the singularly most significant need.

“Social justice” as it is currently being used is not a biblical phrase or concept. While it is a bit of a catch-all type of phrase, the standard definition of social justice is fair and just relations between individuals and society as measured by just distribution of wealth, opportunities and social privileges within society. Thus, not every movement that proclaims social justice is the justice the Bible calls disciples of Jesus to seek. In fact, we cannot assume that any so-called social justice movement is even about justice at all.

The term “justice” is obviously a biblical term. Justice is based upon an objective standard – the law - established by God Himself. God establishes, rules and judges in accordance with His law and requires others to conform to it. God's Word makes it clear that adherence to His law brings rewards, and lack of adherence (sin) has definite consequences. Since God is just, this means that He does not demonstrate favoritism or partiality in the administration of His standards. Only what one has done or has not done is the basis for rewards or consequences. Though we do not see the results now, we are assured that God's justice will be thorough and complete.

All truth claims must be tested by Scripture. Contrasting biblical justice with social justice, we note immediately that justice is driven by God as one of His attributes and social justice as defined is driven by man. Biblical justice is based on absolute and objective standards, God's law. There are no absolute standards within social justice as the socially acceptable standards are subjective. Whereas justice impacts every single person, social justice only calls into question certain specified groups. These are summarized in the following table:

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Biblical Justice	Social Justice
Objective Standard	Subjective Standard
Absolute and Impartial Standard	Pursue What is Believed to be Lacking
Established by God	Established by Man
Expressed in God’s Law	Expressed in Socially Accepted Standards
Applies to Everyone	Applies only to Certain Groups

Though presented otherwise by some, God’s love and justice are never in tension, for His attributes are completely harmonious. Thus, in order to fully understand God’s justice, we must see it in conjunction with all His other attributes including love. In a similar way, in order to better comprehend God’s love, we must define love in light of all His other attributes including justice. This more comprehensive understanding protects against false views of both justice and love. For example, to define love without a context of justice would be mere sentimentality. Further, to assume that love is simply demonstrated by the granting of what someone else desires is not biblical love. For love also entails justice as well as a sense of the welfare for all humans. The good news is that God who is both just and loving, has clearly demonstrated both attributes working together in the offer of Jesus the Messiah as the atonement for sin. The justice as demonstrated through administering the law brings condemnation and wrath, but the gift of righteousness that God gives brings justification and life (Romans 3:19-28) – and this, as a result of Christ’s fulfillment of the law, His bearing the wrath in His death, and His victorious resurrection.

Since God is just, His standard is that all people should be just. Mankind is to be fair in the administration of God’s law, within God-given authority in both the state and in families. Mankind is not to show favoritism or partiality. So biblically, justice is giving what we are obligated to give. For clarity, charity is giving what we are not obligated to give. Since God is “holy, righteous, and just, God requires those who are His image to live justly in the world. This includes showing appropriate respect to every person and giving to each one what he or she is due. We affirm that societies must establish laws to correct injustices that have been imposed through cultural prejudice” (taken from The Statement on Social Justice). Thus, God’s moral law must be put into specific legislation and enforced in society, thus preserving justice and peace in a corrupt world.

Per the earlier discussion of the Great Commission and Great Command, only when the church is completely focused on making disciples of Jesus and not focused on social justice, will disciples be made and then who will go into the world and fulfill the Great Commands of loving God and neighbor. The Great Commission is not a manual on how to transform culture, it is a mandate for the church to proclaim the Gospel

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through Word and Ordinance. God uses the proclamation of the gospel to regenerate human hearts – which is indeed transformation.

How is the church to make disciples? We do not make disciples through community service projects, though community service projects may be someone's next. The church makes disciples through the ordinary means of gospel-centered teaching, gospel-centered worship, gospel-centered community and gospel-centered mission. For the church to isolate the mission apart from this overall process described above is wrong and, in the end, ineffective.

The church has neither the authority nor the competency to bind her members' consciences to matters beyond the scope of the Bible. Thus, SBC will bind our people's consciences to the Word of God, but not beyond. As relevant here, we bind our people's conscience to opposing the abuse of power, and we support God-given hierarchies within family, within church, within our community, within the workplace, and within the state. While we acknowledge that these hierarchies or systems are by God's design, we also know from God's word that mankind is sinful and in rebellion against God. Thus, we know these systems can be used as oppressive. Nonetheless, we continue to support God-designed systems with the exhortation for those within them, to obey God.

In light of the above, any social justice movement that blames inequalities upon systems of oppression while ignoring the sinfulness of humans, is wrong and inadequate. Any social justice movement that attempts to destroy God-given hierarchies is itself in rebellion, for these are designed by God for our good. If social justice movement attempts to classify truth statements, especially Biblical truth, as constructs of an oppressive system, it is an evil attempt to dismiss all viewpoints except one's own. If social justice movement encourages hatred toward particular groups of people, it breaks the great command of loving God and loving neighbor. If a social justice movement seeks to separate people into identity groups that cause mutual suspicion and worse, it is evil. If social justice movement attempts to enforce behavior through intimidation, it is wrong.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation, and indeed is the answer to the issues raised above. The gospel is used by the Holy Spirit to regenerate humans, who then love God and love people with all that they have. The gospel energizes so that we can embrace and seek to live within the hierarchical systems God has designed. The gospel allows us now to overcome evil with good. The Great Commission tasks us to take the gospel to everyone, including cross culturally. The gospel is news that brings true liberation and peace and is contrary to false promises that lead to further bondage and strife.