

For the sake of Christ and his Church

The Statement on Social Justice & the Gospel.

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Introduction

In view of questionable sociological, psychological, and political theories presently permeating our culture and making inroads into Christ's church, we wish to clarify certain key Christian doctrines and ethical principles prescribed in God's Word. Clarity on these issues will fortify believers and churches to withstand an onslaught of dangerous and false teachings that threaten the gospel, misrepresent Scripture, and lead people away from the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Specifically, we are deeply concerned that values borrowed from secular culture are currently undermining Scripture in the areas of race and ethnicity, manhood and womanhood, and human sexuality. The Bible's teaching on each of these subjects is being challenged under the broad and somewhat nebulous rubric of concern for "social justice." If the doctrines of God's Word are not uncompromisingly reasserted and defended at these points, there is every reason to anticipate that these dangerous ideas and corrupted moral values will spread their influence into other realms of biblical doctrines and principles.

We submit these affirmations and denials for public consideration, not with any pretense of ecclesiastical authority, but with an urgency that is mixed with deep joy and sincere sorrow. The rapidity with which these deadly ideas have spread from the culture at large into churches and Christian organizations—including some that are evangelical and Reformed—necessitates the issuing of this statement now.

In the process of considering these matters we have been reminded of the essentials of the faith once for all handed down to the saints, and we are re-committed to contend for it. We have a great Lord and Savior, and it is a privilege to defend his gospel, regardless of cost or consequences. Nevertheless, while we rejoice in that privilege, we grieve that in doing so we know we are taking a stand against the positions of some teachers whom we have long regarded as faithful and trustworthy spiritual guides. It is our earnest prayer that our brothers and sisters will stand firm on the gospel and avoid being blown to and fro by every cultural trend that seeks to move the Church of Christ off course. We must remain steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

The Apostle Paul's warning to the Colossians is greatly needed today: "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" ([Colossians 2:8](#)). The document that follows is an attempt to heed that apostolic command. We invite others who share our concerns and convictions to unite with us in reasserting our unwavering commitment to the teachings of God's Word articulated in this statement. Therefore, for the glory of God among his Church and throughout society, we offer the following affirmations and denials.

Affirmations & Denials

I. Scripture

We affirm that the Bible is God's Word, breathed out by him. It is inerrant, infallible, and the final authority for determining what is true (what we must believe) and what is right (how we must live). All truth claims and ethical standards must be tested by God's final Word, which is Scripture alone.

We deny that Christian belief, character, or conduct can be dictated by any other authority, and we deny that the postmodern ideologies derived from intersectionality, radical feminism, and critical race theory are consistent with biblical teaching. We further deny that competency to teach on any biblical issue comes from any qualification for spiritual people other than clear understanding and simple communication of what is revealed in Scripture.

Scripture: [Genesis 2:18-25](#); [Psalm 19:7-10](#); [1 Corinthians 2:14-15](#); [Ephesians 5:22-33](#); [2 Timothy 3:16-4:5](#); [Hebrews 4:12](#); [13:4](#); [1 Peter 1:25](#); [2 Peter 1:19-21](#)

II. Imago Dei

We Affirm that God created every person equally in his own image. As divine image-bearers, all people have inestimable value and dignity before God and deserve honor, respect and protection. Everyone has been created by God and for God.

We deny that God-given roles, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, sex or physical condition or any other property of a person either negates or contributes to that individual's worth as an image-bearer of God.

Scripture: [Genesis 1:26-30](#); [2:18-22](#); [9:6](#); [2 Corinthians 5:17](#); [Colossians 1:21-22](#)

III. Justice

We affirm that since he is holy, righteous, and just, God requires those who bear 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.

We deny that true justice can be culturally defined or that standards of justice that are merely socially constructed can be imposed with the same authority as those that are derived from Scripture. We further deny that Christians can live justly in the world under any principles other than the biblical standard of righteousness. Relativism, socially-constructed standards of truth or morality, and notions of virtue and vice that are constantly in flux cannot result in authentic justice.

Scripture: [Genesis 18:19](#); [Isaiah 61:8](#); [Micah 6:8](#); [Matthew 5:17-19](#); [Romans 3:31](#)

IV. God's Law

We affirm that God's law, as summarized in the ten commandments, more succinctly summarized in the two great commandments, and manifested in Jesus Christ, is the only standard of unchanging righteousness. Violation of that law is what constitutes sin.

We deny that any obligation that does not arise from God's commandments can be legitimately imposed on Christians as a prescription for righteous living. We further deny

the legitimacy of any charge of sin or call to repentance that does not arise from a violation of God's commandments.

Scripture: [Deuteronomy 10:4](#); [Romans 6:14, 10:5](#); [Galatians 2:16, 3:10, 12](#); [Colossians 2:14-17](#); [Hebrews 10:1](#)

V. Sin

We affirm that all people are connected to Adam both naturally and federally. Therefore, because of original sin everyone is born under the curse of God's law and all break his commandments through sin. There is no difference in the condition of sinners due to age, ethnicity, or sex. All are depraved in all their faculties and all stand condemned before God's law. All human relationships, systems, and institutions have been affected by sin.

We deny that, other than the previously stated connection to Adam, any person is morally culpable for another person's sin. Although families, groups, and nations can sin collectively, and cultures can be predisposed to particular sins, subsequent generations share the collective guilt of their ancestors only if they approve and embrace (or attempt to justify) those sins. Before God each person must repent and confess his or her own sins in order to receive forgiveness. We further deny that one's ethnicity establishes any necessary connection to any particular sin.

Scripture: [Genesis 2:16, 17, 3:12,13-15](#); [Proverbs 29:18](#); [Isaiah 25:7, 60:2-3](#); [Jeremiah 31:27-34](#); [Ezekiel 18:1-9, 14-18](#); [Matthew 23:29-36](#); [Romans 1:16-17, 3:23, 5:12, 10:14-17](#); [1 Corinthians 15:3-11](#); [2 Corinthians 11:3](#); [Galatians 1:6-9](#); [Titus 1:12, 13](#); [Revelation 13:8](#)

VI. Gospel

We affirm that the gospel is the divinely-revealed message concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ—especially his virgin birth, righteous life, substitutionary sacrifice, atoning death, and bodily resurrection—revealing who he is and what he has done with the promise that he will save anyone and everyone who turns from sin by trusting him as Lord.

We deny that anything else, whether works to be performed or opinions to be held, can be added to the gospel without perverting it into another gospel. This also means that implications and applications of the gospel, such as the obligation to live justly in the world, though legitimate and important in their own right, are not definitional components of the gospel.

Scripture: [Genesis 3:15](#); [Proverbs 29:18](#); [Isaiah 25:7, 60:2, 3](#); [Romans 1:16-17, 10:14,15,17](#); [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#); [Galatians 1:6-9](#); [Revelation 13:8](#)

VII. Salvation

We affirm that salvation is granted by God's grace alone received through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Every believer is united to Christ, justified before God, and adopted into his family. Thus, in God's eyes there is no difference in spiritual value or worth among those who are in Christ. Further, all who are united to Christ are also united to one another regardless of age, ethnicity, or sex. All believers are being conformed to the image of Christ. By God's regenerating and sanctifying grace all believers will be brought to a final glorified, sinless state of perfection in the day of Jesus Christ.

We deny that salvation can be received in any other way. We also deny that salvation renders any Christian free from all remaining sin or immune from even grievous sin in this life. We further deny that ethnicity excludes anyone from understanding the gospel, nor does anyone's ethnic or cultural heritage mitigate or remove the duty to repent and believe.

Scripture: [Genesis 3:15](#); [Acts 20:32](#); Romans 3-4; [Ephesians 2:8-9](#); [Galatians 3:28-29](#); [1 John 2:1-2](#)

VIII. The Church

We Affirm that the primary role of the church is to worship God through the preaching of his word, teaching sound doctrine, observing baptism and the Lord's Supper, refuting those who contradict, equipping the saints, and evangelizing the lost. We affirm that when the primacy of the gospel is maintained that this often has a positive effect on the culture in which various societal ills are mollified. We affirm that, under the lordship of Christ, we are to obey the governing authorities established by God and pray for civil leaders.

We Deny that political or social activism should be viewed as integral components of the gospel or primary to the mission of the church. Though believers can and should utilize all lawful means that God has providentially established to have some effect on the laws of a society, we deny that these activities are either evidence of saving faith or constitute a central part of the church's mission given to her by Jesus Christ, her head. We deny that laws or regulations possess any inherent power to change sinful hearts.

Scripture: [Matthew 28:16-20](#); [Romans 13:1-7](#); [1 Timothy 2:1-3](#); [2 Timothy 4:2](#); [Titus 1:9](#); [1 Peter 2:13-17](#)

IX. Heresy

We affirm that heresy is a denial of or departure from a doctrine that is essential to the Christian faith. We further affirm that heresy often involves the replacement of key, essential truths with variant concepts, or the elevation of non-essentials to the status of essentials. To embrace heresy is to depart from the faith once delivered to the saints and thus to be on a path toward spiritual destruction. We affirm that the accusation of heresy should be reserved for those departures from Christian truth that destroy the weight-bearing doctrines of the redemptive core of Scripture. We affirm that accusations of heresy should be accompanied with clear evidence of such destructive beliefs.

We deny that the charge of heresy can be legitimately brought against every failure to achieve perfect conformity to all that is implied in sincere faith in the gospel.

Scripture: [John 14:6](#); [Acts 4:12](#); [Galatians 1:6-9](#); [1 John 4:1-3, 10, 14, 15](#); [5:1, 6-12](#)

X. Sexuality and Marriage

We Affirm that God created mankind male and female and that this divinely determined distinction is good, proper, and to be celebrated. Maleness and femaleness are biologically determined at conception and are not subject to change. The curse of sin results in sinful, disordered affections that manifest in some people as same-sex attraction. Salvation grants sanctifying power to renounce such dishonorable affections as sinful and to mortify them by the Spirit. We further affirm that God's design for marriage is that one woman and one man live in a one-flesh, covenantal, sexual relationship until separated by death.

Those who lack the desire or opportunity for marriage are called to serve God in singleness and chastity. This is as noble a calling as marriage.

We deny that human sexuality is a socially constructed concept. We also deny that one's sex can be fluid. We reject "gay Christian" as a legitimate biblical category. We further deny that any kind of partnership or union can properly be called marriage other than one man and one woman in lifelong covenant together. We further deny that people should be identified as "sexual minorities"—which serves as a cultural classification rather than one that honors the image-bearing character of human sexuality as created by God.

Scripture: [Genesis 1:26-27, 2:24, 4:1, 19:24-28](#); [Matthew 19:3-6](#); [Romans 8:13](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#); [1 Timothy 1:10](#); [Jude 7](#)

XI. Complementarianism

We affirm that God created mankind both male and female with inherent biological and personal distinctions between them and that these created differences are good, proper, and beautiful. Though there is no difference between men and women before God's law or as recipients of his saving grace, we affirm that God has designed men and women with distinct traits and to fulfill distinct roles. These differences are most clearly defined in marriage and the church, but are not irrelevant in other spheres of life. In marriage the husband is to lead, love, and safeguard his wife and the wife is to respect and be submissive to her husband in all things lawful. In the church, qualified men alone are to lead as pastors/elders/bishops and preach to and teach the whole congregation. We further affirm that the image of God is expressed most fully and beautifully in human society when men and women walk in obedience to their God-ordained roles and serve according to their God-given gifts.

We deny that the God-ordained differences in men's and women's roles disparage the inherent spiritual worth or value of one over the other, nor do those differences in any way inhibit either men or women from flourishing for the glory of God.

Scripture: [Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15-25, 3:1-24](#); [Ephesians 5:22-33](#); [1 Corinthians 11:7-9](#); [1 Timothy 2:12-14](#); [Titus 2](#)

XII. Race / Ethnicity

We affirm God made all people from one man. Though people often can be distinguished by different ethnicities and nationalities, they are ontological equals before God in both creation and redemption. "Race" is not a biblical category, but rather a social construct that often has been used to classify groups of people in terms of inferiority and superiority. All that is good, honest, just, and beautiful in various ethnic backgrounds and experiences can be celebrated as the fruit of God's grace. All sinful actions and their results (including evils perpetrated between and upon ethnic groups by others) are to be confessed as sinful, repented of, and repudiated.

We deny that Christians should segregate themselves into racial groups or regard racial identity above, or even equal to, their identity in Christ. We deny that any divisions between people groups (from an unstated attitude of superiority to an overt spirit of resentment) have any legitimate place in the fellowship of the redeemed. We reject any teaching that encourages racial groups to view themselves as privileged oppressors or entitled victims of oppression. While we are to weep with those who weep, we deny that a

person's feelings of offense or oppression necessarily prove that someone else is guilty of sinful behaviors, oppression, or prejudice.

Scripture: [Genesis 1:26–28](#); [Acts 17:24-26](#); [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](#); [2 Corinthians 12:16-18](#)

XIII. Culture

We affirm that some cultures operate on assumptions that are inherently better than those of other cultures because of the biblical truths that inform those worldviews that have produced these distinct assumptions. Those elements of a given culture that reflect divine revelation should be celebrated and promoted. But the various cultures out of which we have been called all have features that are worldly and sinful—and therefore those sinful features should be repudiated for the honor of Christ. We affirm that whatever evil influences to which we have been subjected via our culture can be—and must be—overcome through conversion and the training of both mind and heart through biblical truth.

We deny that individuals and sub-groups in any culture are unable, by God's grace, to rise above whatever moral defects or spiritual deficiencies have been engendered or encouraged by their respective cultures.

Scripture: [Romans 1:18-32](#); [Ephesians 4:17-24](#); [Colossians 3:5-11](#)

XIV. Racism

We affirm that racism is a sin rooted in pride and malice which must be condemned and renounced by all who would honor the image of God in all people. Such racial sin can subtly or overtly manifest itself as racial animosity or racial vainglory. Such sinful prejudice or partiality falls short of God's revealed will and violates the royal law of love. We affirm that virtually all cultures, including our own, at times contain laws and systems that foster racist attitudes and policies.

We deny that treating people with sinful partiality or prejudice is consistent with biblical Christianity. We deny that only those in positions of power are capable of racism, or that individuals of any particular ethnic groups are incapable of racism. We deny that systemic racism is in any way compatible with the core principles of historic evangelical convictions. We deny that the Bible can be legitimately used to foster or justify partiality, prejudice, or contempt toward other ethnicities. We deny that the contemporary evangelical movement has any deliberate agenda to elevate one ethnic group and subjugate another. And we emphatically deny that lectures on social issues (or activism aimed at reshaping the wider culture) are as vital to the life and health of the church as the preaching of the gospel and the exposition of Scripture. Historically, such things tend to become distractions that inevitably lead to departures from the gospel.

Scripture: [Genesis 1:26-27](#); [Deuteronomy 10:17](#); [Acts 10:34](#); [Romans 2:11](#); [Ephesians 6:9](#); [Galatians 3:28](#); [James 2:4](#)

Addendum

For more detailed consideration of some of the issues raised in this statement, we recommend the following two documents:

- [1987 Danvers Statement](#)
- [2017 Nashville Statement](#)

History and Formation

The Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel grew out of a meeting that took place on June 19, 2018. Fourteen men met in Herb's House coffee shop in Dallas, Texas, having all expressed our growing concern with much that was taking place within evangelical circles under the banner of "Social Justice." Josh Buice organized the meeting, Michael O'Fallon helped facilitate it along with Phil Johnson. Though all of us had relationships with some of those in the room, I don't think any of us knew everyone.

As a result of a time of study, fellowship and prayer, we decided to engage in the formation of a statement that would express our concern theologically and in a succinct, balanced way. I was given the responsibility to write the original draft, which, upon completion consisted of an introduction and 13 articles containing affirmations and denials. Josh Buice made initial edits and additions to the statement and then it was made available to all fourteen participants for review & editing. Some men made no suggestions, a few made several (for example, Justin Peters submitted the original version of the article on the church). A few other men and women (it is impossible to know how many) read over the statement and made suggestions. Once the latest draft was posted on a password protected website, it was made available in August to a wider group of readers for suggestions, feedback and support.

Final revisions were made along the way with input from respected theologians and pastors before the statement was published September 4, 2018.

The intent of the framers of this statement has been from the beginning to address ideas and doctrines, not people and organizations. Some of these ideas are being promoted from sectors of the evangelical world that we and others have greatly esteemed and respected. We have tried to highlight the views that we find dangerous to and incompatible with the teachings of Scripture by clearly stating what we affirm and what we deny.

The statement makes no claim of any ecclesiastical authority. It is issued for the purpose of calling attention to and clarifying concerns. We have spoken on these issues with no disrespect or loss of love for our brothers and sisters who disagree with what we have written. Rather, our hope is that this statement might actually provoke the kind of brotherly dialogue that can promote unity in the gospel of our Lord Jesus whom we all love and trust.

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Articles

Article 1—Scripture: Explanation by Tom Ascol

WE AFFIRM that the Bible is God’s Word, breathed out by him. It is inerrant, infallible, and the final authority for determining what is true (what we must believe) and what is right (how we must live). All truth claims and ethical standards must be tested by God’s final Word, which is Scripture alone.

WE DENY that Christian belief, character, or conduct can be dictated by any other authority, and we deny that the postmodern ideologies derived from intersectionality, radical feminism, and critical race theory are consistent with biblical teaching. We further deny that competency to teach on any biblical issue comes from any qualification for spiritual people other than clear understanding and simple communication of what is revealed in Scripture.

The first article in the “Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel” addresses the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. This is highly appropriate for a document that has been issued in order to defend and affirm the gospel of Jesus Christ. How do we know what that gospel is? To what source do those who profess that gospel look for their marching orders? The answer is Scripture and Scripture alone.

The classic passage in the Bible about its nature and authority is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

If the Bible is truly our final authority then other philosophies cannot be. That does not mean that there is nothing useful or true to be found in such philosophies, but that only what is found in them that corresponds to reality as revealed in Scripture is to be accepted. Biology, sociology, psychology, as well as other disciplines, can provide helpful descriptions of reality. Their claims, however, must all be evaluated in the light of Scripture.

This is precisely what God’s people are required to do.

*And when they say to you, “Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,” **should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn**” (Isaiah 8:19-20, my emphasis).*

If the chirpings and mutterings that derive from various aspects of intersectionality, radical feminism, and critical race theory do not accord with God’s written Word, then they are to be dismissed as having no light in them. The Apostle Paul applies this prophetic assessment when he writes, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

The whole “Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel” is an attempt to take Paul’s admonition to heart and clarify key doctrines that are in danger of being undermined by worldly philosophies. These philosophies, if left unchecked, will undermine the gospel of Christ and lead people away from Him.

The statement asserts that “all truth claims and ethical standards must be tested by God’s final Word, which is Scripture alone.” Since Scripture is breathed out by God (θεόπνευστος), it is inerrant and, therefore, authoritative. What it teaches, we are obligated to believe. Where it leads, we are obligated to follow. When anyone tries to influence our faith or conduct as believers we must evaluate what is being said by the Bible. If what is being taught is not explicitly stated or

inferentially contained in the Holy Scriptures then Christians are not to be bound by it as if it comes from God.

What this practically means is that every time we accept teaching that tells us what we “must,” “ought” or “should” believe or do as Christians it is because such teaching derives from God’s Word.

The most faithful, helpful Christian leaders and teachers, then, are those who most clearly understand and simply teach what God has revealed in the Bible. A person’s background or experience may provide peculiar opportunities for understanding Scripture in more personal or practical ways, but it is only competency in handling the Word of God that makes such a person a trustworthy spiritual guide.

Spiritual people, that is, those who have been born of God’s Spirit and are trusting Jesus Christ as Lord, want to grow in His grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). This is both a privilege and a responsibility and is what leads to spiritual maturity. Such maturity, far more than one’s race, sex or life experiences, is what qualifies a believer to be helpful to others in knowing and following Christ.

Ours is a day when authority is perhaps the most crucial issue confronting us. We are like the servants in Jesus’ parable of the ten minas (Luke 19:11-27). Instead of carrying out his business as we await his return, too often our attitude says, “We do not want this man to reign over us” (14). Yet, Christ is our only King. Because of that, his Word is our final authority.

In Romans 12:2 Paul gives us a straightforward command. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” The only way to obey this admonition and to avoid being pressed into the world’s ways of thinking, feeling, and aspiring is by the continual training and renewing of our minds. That is, we must keep growing in our understanding and application of Scripture. We must learn it, believe it, and submit our lives to it.

Only by such commitment to God’s Word will Christians be able to distinguish between truth and error and avoid being led astray by false teaching that creeps into our churches.

Article 2—The Imago Dei: Explanation by James White

WE AFFIRM that God created every person equally in his own image. As divine image-bearers, all people have inestimable value and dignity before God and deserve honor, respect and protection. Everyone has been created by God and for God.

WE DENY that God-given roles, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, sex or physical condition or any other property of a person either negates or contributes to that individual's worth as an image-bearer of God.

The Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel, after proclaiming the highest view of Scripture, affirms, briefly but forcefully, the reality of the creation of mankind, all ethnicities, all tribes, all peoples, in the *imago Dei*, the image of God. While this affirmation would have been supercilious only a few centuries ago, today, especially in Western culture, it is not only necessary, it is almost startling.

Christianity's doctrine of man has always been grounded in the reality of God as *Creator*. The entirety of the narrative of salvation in the Christian Scriptures, the Bible, is based upon God's power and might seen most importantly in His being called "Creator." Since God is the origin and source of all things, He defines them, gives them meaning, and this is the ground we have of confidence in being able to obtain true knowledge of the universe around us and even of our own selves. Without a Creator, we are left awash in a vast expanse that is random and chaotic.

As the West has worked very hard to distance its thought from the idea of a Creator (most often so as to allow for sexual license and expression) the concurrent result has been a diminishment in its view of man. Man is now barely distinguishable from the animals, a cosmic accident without transcendent value or worth. Once this view of man becomes entrenched, the entire basis of law must shift away from that provided by the Christian faith in the past.

Once the basis of law moves away from its historic roots, of necessity all definitions and concepts of "justice" must be altered as well. So much of the current controversy is due to just this: what is just and right in a world created by God indwelt by His creatures who are endued with His image will differ greatly from what is just and right in a random, purposeless, accidental world filled with random animals fighting for survival and dominance. The Christian worldview with its wise and powerful Creator has grounds for asserting man's transcendent worth as man bears God's image. As this conviction becomes more remote in the consciousness of Western societies, grave changes will result.

The Christian conviction that *all* men and women *together* share the *imago Dei* is central to the gospel message preached by Jesus and the Apostles. The means by which God brings His people to redemption is found in the cross of Jesus Christ. There the elect of God, joined to Christ by the Father's divine sovereignty ([John 6:37-35](#)), are joined to His death in their place. There is not one death for men, another for women, one for one ethnicity and another for others. The fact that there is but one sacrifice for "men from every tribe, tongue, people and nation" ([Revelation 5:9-10](#)) is strong evidence of the universal reality of the *equality* of men and women before God: both in their sinfulness, and in their redemption. Therefore, in those times past when Christians allowed themselves to be influenced more by their cultural concepts than by Scriptural categories, and the gospel was in any way altered by ethnic concepts, hindered by racial prejudices, or watered down in its application, God was not glorified and the church was substantially damaged. This was, and remains, sin. The gospel of Jesus Christ affirms by its very nature, provision, and demands, the *imago Dei*'s universal character across all ethnic and cultural lines. The same Son of God had to give Himself completely for each and every one of His elect people. Few things could confirm the true equality of the peoples like the gospel!

Just as the positive affirmation enshrined in the Statement reflects these theological realities, the negative statement is concerned to protect these truths from redefinition or distortion. The *imago Dei* is neither negated by, nor added to, by one's external circumstances. The powerful are not more like God because of their power, the poor not less (or more!) like Him in their poverty. No nation bestows upon its citizens a closer resemblance to the Creator, a greater level of image-bearing, and surely no ethnicity can, or should, make such a claim. Every attempt by such groups in the past to lay claim to this divine truth with that kind of very human deviation deserves prompt and thorough repudiation.

While the Christian does not bear more of the image of God than the non-Christian, in and through Christ that image is restored and made right with God. But that does not make the Christian *more human*, but instead makes him or her *a redeemed human* with the promise that, eventually, all that detracts from the fulness of the display of that image will be removed and we will be changed to be like Christ in His fulness. But this is always a work of grace and comes to us from outside, not on the basis of merit, but solely upon that of mercy, grace, and love.

While this portion of the Statement is indeed brief, it is foundational to all that comes thereafter in its affirmation of the only ground of true equality that mankind could ever need: the fact that each man, woman and child is made in the image of God and is therefore worthy of respect and honor. The farther societies move away from this divine and biblical truth the greater will be the probability, even the necessity, of degradation, the loss of liberty, and the rise of concepts of ethnic or national superiority.

Article 3—Justice: Explanation by Phil Johnson

WE AFFIRM that since he is holy, righteous, and just, God requires those who bear 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.

WE DENY that true justice can be culturally defined or that standards of justice that are merely socially constructed can be imposed with the same authority as those that are derived from Scripture. We further deny that Christians can live justly in the world under any principles other than the biblical standard of righteousness. Relativism, socially-constructed standards of truth or morality, and notions of virtue and vice that are constantly in flux cannot result in authentic justice.

Justice is, of course, a major theme in Scripture. In fact, it's a much larger concept—and more central to the Gospel—than most people realize. In both Hebrew and Greek, the words translated “justice” and “just” are the same words normally translated “righteousness” and “righteous.” No distinction is made in the original text of Scripture. The biblical idea of justice encompasses everything the Bible says about righteousness.

In English, when we use the word *justice*, we normally have in mind evenhanded impartiality (especially in the realm of law and civic affairs). The dictionary defines justice as “maintenance of legal, social, or moral principles by the exercise of authority or power—including the assignment of deserved reward or punishment.”

Righteousness denotes virtue, uprightness, moral rectitude—godly character.

Because we differentiate between the words and use them differently, we tend to think of *justice* predominantly as a legal standard or civic paradigm, and *righteousness* as something more personal. Again, Scripture makes no such distinction. In the Bible, justice and righteousness are the same thing, encompassing all the legitimate connotations of both words.

How comprehensive is this idea? God Himself is the embodiment and the touchstone of true righteousness. The moral principles spelled out in His law describe what human righteousness looks like. In fact, when Moses delivered the tablets of stone from Sinai to the people, he said, “It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us” (Deut. 6:25). Jesus exposed the rigors of this standard even more clearly when He said, “You ...must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

But now you are talking about the law, you might protest. How can you say it's central to the gospel? Aren't you the guy who scolded preachers of social justice for mingling or confusing law and gospel?” Excellent question, and it requires a two-part answer.

First, justice is a vital gospel issue because the atoning work of Christ turned divine justice in favor of sinners who trust Him as Savior. “For our sake [God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Having fulfilled the whole law to absolute perfection, Jesus (who “knew no sin” by experience) bore the sins of others (by imputation). Those sins were accounted as if they were His, and He fully paid the due penalty, so that His own perfect righteousness could be imputed to His people. The law has thus been perfectly fulfilled and sin fully punished in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. So God can “be *just* and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and *just* to forgive us our sins . . . We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ *the righteous*” (1 Jn. 1:9–2:1).

Second, “social justice” is entirely different from biblical justice. It is a severely abridged and often badly twisted notion of legal equity—dealing mainly with matters like economics, social

privilege, and civil rights. In recent years, a plethora of politically correct causes have been added to the menu, including global warming, animal rights, abortion rights, LGBTQ rights, gender fluidity, war, immigration, socialism, and a cornucopia of similar issues borrowed from the political left.

Historically, social justice advocates have not concerned themselves much if at all with other vital aspects of biblical justice, including the moral content of the law (particularly biblical standards of sexual purity); condign punishment for evildoers ([Gen. 9:6](#); [Rom. 13:4](#); [Matt. 26:52](#)); and the duty and privilege of work ([2 Thess. 3:10](#)).

To be clear, there is no single authoritative definition of “social justice.” Definitions abound from those who are promoting the terminology. But there are common themes that run through virtually all of them. Here are a couple of typical samples: “Social justice is a political and philosophical concept which holds that all people should have equal access to wealth, health, well-being, justice and opportunity.” And “Social justice is the equal access to wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.”

Those familiar with neo-Marxist rhetoric will recognize the themes. Indeed, the derivation and connotations of the expression “social justice” are rooted in secular political and academic dialogues rather than in biblical ideas about divine justice. The rhetoric of social justice has gradually migrated from the radical far left by a dialectical process. Early in that process, the language was baptized and the worldview was given a religious veneer replete with a name: *Liberation Theology*. The same language and rhetoric were brought into evangelical circles through groups like Sojourners and the Emerging Church movement. Then it was disbursed through student groups like InterVarsity. And most recently it has found its way into more conservative organizations like The Gospel Coalition and Together for the Gospel, and it seems to have been accepted by large numbers of evangelicals with great enthusiasm.

Despite the claims of its proponents, however, the popular notion of “social justice” was *not* derived from Scripture. It actually began among people well known for their hostility to biblical authority—and the pedigree is not at all difficult to trace.

The dangers of this world-view’s influence are not really hard to see, either. Read the chatter in social media and you’ll regularly encounter young fair-weather evangelicals who say they have abandoned (or are in the process of abandoning) their evangelical convictions now that they are “woke.” Even some of the respected evangelical leaders who have lately become enthralled with “social justice” seem to have fallen silent on the issue of abortion—an [easily quantifiable injustice](#) that is responsible for the deaths of more disadvantaged and defenseless children *each day* than all the unjust police shootings of the past fifty years combined.

When the [Statement on Social Justice](#) denies “that true justice can be culturally defined or that standards of justice that are merely socially constructed can be imposed with the same authority as those that are derived from Scripture,” it is referring to this fact: “Social justice” is *not* biblical justice.

Article 4—God’s Law: Explanation by Tom Ascol

WE AFFIRM that God’s law, as summarized in the ten commandments, more succinctly summarized in the two great commandments, and manifested in Jesus Christ, is the only standard of unchanging righteousness. Violation of that law is what constitutes sin.

WE DENY that any obligation that does not arise from God’s commandments can be legitimately imposed on Christians as a prescription for righteous living. We further deny the legitimacy of any charge of sin or call to repentance that does not arise from a violation of God’s commandments.

The same God who gave us the gospel has also given us his law. This point can be easily overlooked by Christians who are concerned to be centered on the gospel. That concern is appropriate and those believers who have lived through seasons where the gospel was neglected or at best assumed are understandably sensitive to anything that would compete with its pride of place in the life of the church. However, we can never honor God’s gospel by despising his law.

In fact, lack of clarity about the nature and significance of the law inevitably results in a lack of clarity or even confusion about the gospel. A clear understanding of God’s law provides the foundation for the proclamation of the gospel. I agree with John Bunyan, who wrote, “The man who does not know the nature of the law cannot know the nature of sin. And he who does not know the nature of sin cannot know the nature of the Savior.”

Article 4 of the [Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel](#) is vital because it gets at the foundation of much that is being erroneously advocated under the banner of social justice. John Newton wisely observed,

Ignorance of the nature and design of the law is at the bottom of most religious mistakes. This is the root of self-righteousness, the grand reason why the Gospel of Christ is no more regarded, and the cause of that uncertainty and inconsistency in many, who, though they profess themselves teachers, understand not what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

The God who saves us is the same God who created us and who rules us. He has revealed his will to us in his law. Our duty, therefore, can only be defined in terms of what he has commanded.

Obviously, Scripture reveals various types of commandments that have come from God. To rightly understand our relationship to all that has been commanded we must make distinctions, as Paul clearly does in [Romans 2:25-27](#).

Historically, interpreters from Thomas Aquinas to John Calvin to the Puritans to the [Westminster & Second London Confessions of Faith](#) have all recognized a three-fold division within the commandments in order to understand God’s law. As [John MacArthur helpfully explains](#),

“We can divide the law of God into three parts: the moral law, the judicial law, and the ceremonial law. The moral law was for all men, the judicial law was just for Israel, and the ceremonial law was for Israel’s worship of God. So the moral law encompasses all men, it is narrowed down to Israel in the judicial law, and to the worship of Israel toward God in the ceremonial law.”

It is that moral law that the statement affirms as God’s unchanging standard of righteousness. In other words, God and God alone has the authority to tell us what constitutes righteousness and, conversely, what sin is.

This is vital for Christians to keep in mind as we think about how people should live. We are not free to live only for ourselves. We were made for God and must love him supremely above all else. Along with that we must love our neighbors—our fellow image-bearers—sincerely.

What does such love look like? It looks like obedience to God’s commandments. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” ([John 14:15](#)) and Paul writes, “For the

commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” ([Romans 13:9](#)).

What does sin look like? Violation of God’s commandments ([1 John 3:4](#)). Before we call anyone to repentance we should be clear that the offense in view is actually a violation of God’s law. And before we start justifying ourselves by thinking that the moral law only governs our outward actions, we must remember the strictness and spirituality of that law as explained by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Both the physical act of adultery as well as the lustful, sexual desires are violations of the seventh commandment.

Though the law of God was never designed to provide a way of salvation for sinners, it does show us what God requires. That remains just as true for Christians as for unbelievers. It also helps us to understand and appreciate all that Jesus has provided for us by his life of obedience and death in behalf of lawbreakers.

It is impossible for people to live without standards of right and wrong. When God’s standard that he has revealed in his law is ignored, neglected or assumed, you can be sure that other, man-made standards will be enforced. That is why J. Gresham Machen’s words are as true now as they were when he wrote them in the early part of the twentieth century:

A new and more powerful proclamation of [the] law is perhaps the most pressing need of the hour; men would have little difficulty with the gospel if they had only learned the lesson of the law.... So it always is; a low view of law always brings legalism in religion; a high view of law makes a man a seeker after grace. Pray God that the high view may again prevail.

Article 5—Sin: Explanation by Tom Buck

WE AFFIRM that all people are connected to Adam both naturally and federally. Therefore, because of original sin everyone is born under the curse of God's law and all break his commandments through sin. There is no difference in the condition of sinners due to age, ethnicity, or sex. All are depraved in all their faculties and all stand condemned before God's law. All human relationships, systems, and institutions have been affected by sin.

WE DENY that, other than the previously stated connection to Adam, any person is morally culpable for another person's sin. Although families, groups, and nations can sin collectively, and cultures can be predisposed to particular sins, subsequent generations share the collective guilt of their ancestors only if they approve and embrace (or attempt to justify) those sins. Before God each person must repent and confess his or her own sins in order to receive forgiveness. We further deny that one's ethnicity establishes any necessary connection to any particular sin.

Recognition and repentance of sin are both central to the proclamation of the gospel. When Peter preached to the Jews at Pentecost, he confronted their sin by declaring, "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" ([Acts 2:23](#)).

When the crowd recognized their guilt, their hearts were pierced, and they cried out to ask what they must do. Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" ([Acts 2:38](#)). If they were to be saved, the message was clear: they must recognize and repent of their sins and identify with Christ. The ones who received and acted on Peter's words were saved that day ([Acts 2:41](#)).

Recognition and repentance of sin are both central to the practice of the gospel, It is the pattern of the Christian life as we continue to walk in the light. Consider the familiar words of the Apostle John that were written to believers: "If we say we have not sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" ([1 Jn 1:8-9](#)).

These words are both sobering and encouraging. If we ignore or deny our sin, we demonstrate that the truth of God does not indwell us. In other words, failing to recognize our sin is serious business; it evidences we are not saved. However, the wonderful news is when we confess our sins, God forgives us and cleanses us. He is faithful and just to do so because he is keeping his promise that our sins have been punished through the cross on the basis of Christ's blood.

The Bible is replete with warnings about the danger of concealing our sins as well as the blessings of confessing them. Therefore, it is critical that we are able to know the sins for which we truly bear guilt so that we may confess them. Our salvation and blessed life as a Christian depend upon this. Simply put, if we have sinned, we must recognize our guilt and confess that before God in order to receive forgiveness.

This truth becomes crucial in the ongoing debate about social justice among evangelicals. Some argue that people today not only bear the guilt for their own sins, but also for the sins of past generations – particularly those of racism. For example, even though none of us were alive during the practice of American slavery, and many were not yet born at the time of Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder, some argue that whites should both confess and repent of the sins of their ancestors in these matters.

Article 6 of the Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel addresses this critical error. Scripture is clear that although we are all sinners, by nature and practice, no one is morally culpable and called to repent for someone else's sin ([Rom 5:12](#)).

Nevertheless, some reference [Exodus 20:5](#) where God says he will “visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.” Therefore, it is argued, future generations can be complicit in the sins of their ancestors.

However, the text actually assigns this guilt to “those who hate me.” The warning places guilt upon those who continue to walk in the wicked ways of their ancestors. The children share in their father’s guilt because they share in their father’s sins. This is further clarified by the prophet Ezekiel’s words:, “The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father for the iniquity of the son” ([Ezk 18:20](#)).

This continues to be the case in the New Testament. Nowhere do we find guilt assigned to individuals for the sins of others. Each person is called upon to confess their personal sins in order to receive forgiveness. Hence, John declares, “If we confess **our** sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us **our** sins...” ([1 Jn 1:9](#)).

But what about Peter’s sermon at Pentecost as was referenced earlier? Is that not an example of guilt being assigned to a group of people for the sins of others? Peter said to the entire crowd, “**you** crucified and killed Jesus.” Everyone knows that it was the Jewish leadership who handed Jesus over, Pilate who sent him to the cross, and Roman soldiers who nailed him to that tree. Yet, Peter declares to every person within the sound of his voice that it was they who are guilty of this vile sin.

We must remember Peter is preaching this sermon in the heart of Jerusalem – the very place where Jesus had been unjustly tried and crucified mere weeks prior. It was the Jewish leaders who handed Jesus over to the Roman government and called for his execution ([Jn 18:28-31](#)). When Pilate gave the Jewish crowds the opportunity to set Jesus free, they demanded that he be crucified, and they vowed, “His blood be on us and on our children” ([Mt 27:15-26](#)).

Furthermore, this was no sin of ignorance. Peter declared that Jesus was “a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know” ([Acts 2:22](#)). There was ample evidence that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but essentially the entire nation had rejected him and insisted he be crucified. Virtually everyone in the nation of Israel was active in the crucifixion and murder of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, Peter’s pronouncement of guilt upon this Jewish crowd in the heart of Jerusalem was certainly justified.

However, before we rush to embrace the idea of corporate guilt, we must consider some vital facts.

First, neither Peter nor any of the other apostles include themselves in the guilt of killing Jesus. They also were Jews, in Jerusalem when he was crucified, and most of them abandoned him in that very hour. Yet, they seem to bear no guilt.

Second, no Jews are told throughout the rest of the New Testament that they are guilty for the crucifixion of Jesus. When Paul preached to the Jews in Antioch, he declared, “those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers” condemned Jesus ([Acts 13:27](#)). This continues to be the pattern throughout the rest of Acts.

Surely the crucifixion of Jesus was the greatest act of injustice in the history of the world, yet his death was not laid at the feet of future Jewish generations. There could be no greater evidence that one’s ethnicity does not establish any necessary connection to any particular sin. Clearly, we are called upon to confess our own sins, not the sins of others.

The Scripture must be our only guide in matters of guilt and repentance. We do not have the right to burden people with guilt that God’s Law does not clearly lay upon them, and we certainly should not call upon people to repent for sins in which they bear no legitimate guilt. To do such a thing is to go beyond the line of Scripture and is nothing less than “teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” ([Mk 7:7](#)).

The truth is there is real hatred towards others that dwells in our own hearts that calls for confession and repentance. The gospel demands that we do the harder task of confronting the real guilt of sin that we indeed bear, and the humble repentance God requires. This is the task to which we must be fully committed. As important as brotherly reconciliation is, there is more at stake when we assign guilt for sin and call for repentance. What is at risk is our personal standing before God ([1 Jn 1:8-9](#)).

C.S. Lewis addressed this issue in his time. At the beginning of WWII, young Christians were calling upon England to repent of her past sins they believed contributed to the evils of the war. They claimed England was reaping what it had sown from the nation's prior actions.

Lewis wrote an article entitled "[Dangers of National Repentance](#)," where he declared, "Young Christians are turning to it in large numbers." But what harm is there, Lewis reasoned, in having a heart that is willing to repent of any sin – even if it is not directly your own? He saw it as a grave danger with no sign of spiritual health at all. Scripture calls us to do the harder work of repenting of our own sin.

Therefore, I believe C. S. Lewis' warning then is as relevant to the discussion among evangelicals now: "The first and fatal charm of national repentance is the encouragement it gives us to turn from the bitter task of repenting of our own sins to the congenial one of bewailing the conduct of others."

Article 6—Gospel: Explanation by Josh Buice

WE AFFIRM that the gospel is the divinely-revealed message concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ—especially his virgin birth, righteous life, substitutionary sacrifice, atoning death, and bodily resurrection—revealing who he is and what he has done with the promise that he will save anyone and everyone who turns from sin by trusting him as Lord.

WE DENY that anything else, whether works to be performed or opinions to be held, can be added to the gospel without perverting it into another gospel. This also means that implications and applications of the gospel, such as the obligation to live justly in the world, though legitimate and important in their own right, are not definitional components of the gospel.

Within the evangelical culture today marketing tactics often employ keywords as a means of increasing sales. There is no greater marketing term in our day than the word *gospel*. Many people believe that if they can somehow attach the word *gospel* to their product as a descriptor it will bring instant success. It's not uncommon to see people talking about *gospel* books, *gospel* marketing, *gospel* people, *gospel* diet, *gospel* music, and *gospel* issues. In the controversy on social justice, people are insisting that it's a *gospel* issue. In the same way that everything we disagree with isn't heresy, everything that we do agree with isn't a gospel issue.

The New Testament Greek word for *gospel* (εὐαγγέλιον) literally means “good news.” While many have objected to “[The Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel](#)” as being unaware of cultural evils and misinformed of how to approach the depravity of our culture, it really becomes a heated discussion when we insert the gospel. Some consider social justice a gospel issue while others would say that it's something that is acutely affected and influenced by the gospel. This is why implications, applications, and illustrations must be handled with precision and care. In most cases, both groups (woke and non-woke) evangelicals would agree on the gospel, but the real controversy comes in how the gospel is applied to a culture. In this case, the controversy is centered primarily in the denial of *Article VI*.

Defining our Terms

Paul made a definitive statement in [1 Corinthians 15:3-4](#) as he penned his letter to the church in the city of Corinth. He provides a summary statement of the gospel by writing, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” In [Romans 1:16](#), Paul stated that he was not ashamed of the gospel. Robert Haldane comments on [Romans 1:16](#) by stating:

This Gospel, then, which Paul was ready to preach, and of which he was not ashamed, was the Gospel of God concerning His Son. The term Gospel, which signifies glad tidings, is taken from [Isaiah 52:7](#), and [61:1](#), where the Messiah is introduced as saying, “The Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings.” [1]

The glad tidings of God (gospel) involve the glorious mystery of God's mercy and saving grace that is granted to fallen sinners through the blood sacrifice of Jesus. What better message could we be identified by and what better message could stand at the heart of our ministry? God the Son took upon himself human flesh, lived a sinless life which the first Adam failed to do, and then was crushed by the Father on the cross in the place of ruined sinners. The message of the gospel points to the fact that Jesus proved his sovereign power by the resurrection and we cling to his work alone by faith for the remission of sin. His unconditional grace is granted to all who believe—regardless of the color of skin, economic status, sex, or intellectual capabilities of the repentant sinner.

Affirming our Denial

Any statement containing affirmations and denials will bring heat in the area of what the document is intended to oppose. In the case of the gospel, while social justice is not a “gospel issue” in the sense that it’s not a definitional component of the gospel—it’s quite possible to insert social justice into the gospel and thereby create a specific brand of heresy ([Gal. 1:6-9](#)). In the denial, the Statement reads:

We deny that anything else, whether works to be performed or opinions to be held, can be added to the gospel without perverting it into another gospel.

Within this debate on social justice, some people are suggesting that if you’re not performing works of social justice (admitting systemic racism, oppression, and other injustices while working toward a solution) that you are not a true follower of Jesus.

Thabiti Anyabwile, in his sermon, “[Preach Justice as True Worship](#)” made the following statement:

“We preach and we do justice because we wish to be like our Lord and we wish to see his righteousness fill the earth. The pursuit of justice and equity does not take us from the heart of our Savior. The pursuit of justice and equity takes us deeper into the heart of our Savior. If we know God in Jesus Christ whom he has sent, then we have been instructed by wisdom. And indeed if Christ has been made to be wisdom for us, then as the proverbs say we ought to understand justice completely. We ought to understand that doing justice is essential to that worship that pleases God our father.”

When I hear a statement such as this, I find so much with which I can agree completely. In fact, if you look at the whole article which comes from his sermon that’s linked on the same page, you see a reference to [Romans 12:1-2](#) and the call to becoming a “living sacrifice.” If by “doing justice” Thabiti Anyabwile means that we should stand in opposition to sinful behavior, live righteously, and love our neighbor—I can agree with such a statement. If, by chance, Thabiti Anyabwile intends that we become socially and politically engaged while embracing the ideologies of *white privilege*, *systemic racism*, and the *systemic oppression of women* within our culture and specifically evangelicalism—I would reject his understating of *worship*. We can’t teach Christians to assume the gospel and to emphasize justice and expect a good outcome.

Bishop Rudolph McKissick, Jr. recently posted a [clip of a sermon](#) where the following statement was made:

“Social justice is a biblical issue...it’s not a black issue, it’s a humanity issue. It’s not a hood issue, it’s a global issue. And until we understand that Jesus himself said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach liberty to the captive, to set free those who are oppressed.” If that ain’t social justice, I don’t know what is.”

Not only is that a misguided approach to biblical hermeneutics—it misses the point of [Luke 4:16-30](#). A clear contextual reading of that account of Jesus in Nazareth will demonstrate that God often does the unexpected. Furthermore, the emphasis is placed upon the spiritual poverty and slavery to sin and how Christ delivers people from spiritual poverty rather than the social needs of individuals.

It is critical that we are crystal clear about what we believe the gospel to be, the basis of biblical worship, and the mission of the Church. If a person is not careful, mission drift can lead the local church and the local pastor off into the world of cultural Marxism and fairly soon the pulpit which was once the focal point of Christian worship is transformed into a political stump where humanitarian “do-gooder” talks are delivered to socially motivated people in the name of Jesus.

We are slaves of righteousness as children of God and we must live justly in a fallen world. However, how we live (for good or evil) has nothing to do with the definition of the gospel. How we live will be shaped by the gospel as James rightly articulated the point that “faith apart from works is dead” ([James 2:26](#)). We must not celebrate sin nor tolerate injustice—especially within the ranks of evangelicalism. Such an acceptance of evil would be the height of hypocrisy.

Tim Keller has recently spoken out against “The Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel,” [stating the following](#):

It’s not so much what [the statement] says, but what it does. It’s trying to marginalize people talking about race and justice, it’s trying to say, ‘You’re really not biblical’ and it’s not fair in that sense...If somebody tried to go down [the statement] with me, ‘Will you agree with this, will you agree with this,’ I would say, ‘You’re looking at the level of what it says and not the level of what it’s doing. I do think what it’s trying to do is it’s trying to say, ‘Don’t make this emphasis, don’t worry about the poor, don’t worry about the injustice, that’s really what it’s saying.’ Even if I could agree with most of it...it’s what it’s doing that I don’t like.

What exactly is the Statement seeking to *do* with its words? Is the document really seeking to marginalize people who genuinely care for the poor and mobilize relief efforts to care for such individuals in the name of Christ? Is it really true that the Statement is seeking to marginalize people who oppose racism?

The Statement does have several goals and one is to separate the gospel from social justice. In fact, it would be really helpful to drop “social” as a descriptor of biblical justice altogether. It’s the gospel that changes the heart of fallen depraved sinners ([2 Cor. 5:17](#)). Only through the power of the gospel can a dead sinner be given life. This is a work of God’s saving grace and we must remember that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ ([Rom. 10:17](#)).

How Does the Gospel Produce the Fruit of Righteousness and Justice?

The mission of the gospel is to bring depraved sinners into reconciliation with God ([2 Cor. 5:17-6:2](#)). Reconciliation only happens through the power of the gospel ([Rom. 1:16](#)). Preaching justice will lead people to fear the sword in the hand of the government ([Rom. 13:1-7](#)). Preaching the gospel will lead people to fear God who is bigger than the government ([Rom. 3:18](#); [2 Cor. 5:11](#)).

When Amy Carmichael went to serve in India, she was no jewelry-laden prosperity preacher nor was she a low-beam humanitarian aid servant. She was a high-beam bright light in India who served children and broken women with the gospel of Jesus. Yet, as she witnessed the Hindu *suttee* and heard the cries of women being burned alive (Hindu people believed that women should want to die when their husbands died, so as they burned the body of the widow’s husband, they would place her on the funeral pyre of her dead husband) she engaged in the pursuit of *justice* for these women and labored to stop this practice. Her engagement was motivated by her gospel mission in India.

John Paton was convinced that the gospel had the power to change the heart of even the hardest sinner. As he penned his autobiography, he wanted to prove his point to the sophisticated Europeans who had a low view of the power of the gospel. As he recounted what he had witnessed in his ministry, he penned the following account of the conversion of Kowia, a chief on Tanna. When he was dying he came to say farewell to Paton.

“Farewell, Missi, I am very near death now; we will meet again in Jesus and with Jesus!”...Abraham sustained him, tottering to the place of graves; there he lay down...and slept in Jesus; and there the faithful Abraham buried him beside his wife and children. Thus died a man who had been a cannibal chief, but by the grace of God and the love of Jesus changed, transfigured into a character of light and beauty. What think ye of this, ye skeptics as to the reality of

conversion?...I knew that day, and I know now, that there is one soul at least from Tanna to sing the glories of Jesus in Heaven—and, oh, the rapture when I meet him there! [2]

When Jim Elliot and his missionary partners never called out on their radio after their encounter with the savage Auca Indians in the jungle of Ecuador, the wives of these men feared the worst. After a search team was sent into the jungle to locate the men, they found their bodies. They had been attacked and killed by the Indians as they sought to reach them with the gospel. Less than two years later Elisabeth Elliot (the wife of Jim Elliot) and her daughter Valerie along with Rachel Saint (Nate's sister) moved to the Auca village. The once savage people were transformed by the gospel and today they are a friendly tribe. It was a commitment to the gospel that radically changed the Auca tribe even resulting in the change of their name to the Huaorani tribe.

As the local church is committed to the gospel (from preaching to discipleship)—hearts are changed and it results in a more just and equitable society. The Church of Jesus is committed to doing justice, but justice can't change a person's heart and biblical justice cannot be disconnected from the gospel. While justice is not the gospel, true biblical justice is connected to our God and you can't have the gospel without God. Social justice leads people toward humanitarian work and social engagement while the gospel leads the Church to put their faith into action. When the gospel changes a person's heart it will lead them to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly for the glory of God ([Micah 6:8](#); [1 Cor. 10:31](#)).

1. Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of Romans*, electronic ed. (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation, 1996), 55.

2. John Paton, *The Autobiography of the Pioneer Missionary to the New Hebrides (Vanuatu)*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2013), 160.

Article 7—Salvation: Explanation by Justin Peters

WE AFFIRM that salvation is granted by God’s grace alone received through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Every believer is united to Christ, justified before God, and adopted into his family. Thus, in God’s eyes there is no difference in spiritual value or worth among those who are in Christ. Further, all who are united to Christ are also united to one another regardless of age, ethnicity, or sex. All believers are being conformed to the image of Christ. By God’s regenerating and sanctifying grace all believers will be brought to a final glorified, sinless state of perfection in the day of Jesus Christ.

WE DENY that salvation can be received in any other way. We also deny that salvation renders any Christian free from all remaining sin or immune from even grievous sin in this life. We further deny that ethnicity excludes anyone from understanding the gospel, nor does anyone’s ethnic or cultural heritage mitigate or remove the duty to repent and believe.

Salvation. It, along with the related term *gospel* (the subject matter of Article VI), is one of the most widely used and recognized of evangelical terms but also one about which there is much misunderstanding.

The New Testament employs two primary words for salvation: *sozo* (σῶζω) and *rhuomai* (ῥύομαι), both of which carry the idea of rescue or deliverance. Salvation then, in a very real sense, is an act of deliverance and being saved is to be in a constant state of being delivered. When God saves someone, He delivers that person. In [Psalm 144:1-2](#) David writes, “Blessed be the Lord, my rock...my lovingkindness and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer.” God, by His character and nature is a deliverer. But from what? From what are we delivered and into what are we delivered?

We are delivered from ourselves – Most people today have this vague belief that as long as they are “good” people who do good works and are sincere that these efforts will earn them a place in Heaven. The notion that we can *save* ourselves, referred to by theologians as *auto-soterism*, may be popular but it is foreign to the Bible. Scripture very clearly teaches that “all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment” ([Isaiah 64:6](#)) before a thrice holy God. Good works will profit those apart from Christ nothing in the day of judgment and will serve only as damning testaments against their self-righteousness.

Just as the Ethiopian cannot change his skin and the leopard cannot change his spots ([Jeremiah 13:23](#)), so we cannot deliver ourselves. Repentance from sin is not something a person can do on his own. Repentance unto salvation is in and of itself granted by God ([Acts 5:30-31](#); [11:17-18](#); [2 Timothy 2:24-26](#)). Saving faith in Christ’s atoning work on the cross is also granted by God. The Apostle Paul writes,

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)).

The “gift of God” in the Greek is grammatically neutral indicating that both grace and faith are divine gifts sovereignly given by God. If we could somehow gin up faith on our own then we would have reason to boast in ourselves. But such self-boasting is exactly one of the things from which the Gospel delivers us.¹

We are delivered from sin and its power – When God grants repentance and saving faith a person is delivered from the judicial penalty of sin. Every human being is a sinner by nature, by choice and by action ([John 3:19](#); [Romans 3:23](#); [5:12](#)) and is spiritually dead deservedly facing eternal judgment in Hell ([Ephesians 2:1, 3](#); [Romans 6:23](#); [Revelation 14:9-11](#)). Once wrought in the human heart, the miracle of the new birth frees so completely from the penalty of sin that “there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” and against God’s elect no one can bring a charge ([Romans 8:1, 33](#)).

Not only are we delivered from sin's penalty, but we are also delivered from its power over us. Before conversion a person is a helpless slave to the ruthless master of his own depraved desires. After conversion, he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God and is a slave to his new Master, Jesus Christ. The Christian has been granted a new nature and with it comes new desires. As believers we begin to love what God loves and hate what He hates.

It is not that a Christian is incapable of sin. Though often used in an evangelistic context, [1 John 1:9](#) is written to believers, not the lost. As Christians we can and do sin. But the glorious truth is that though Christians stumble into sin, they do not swim in sin. Christians do not relish sin and look for opportunities to sin. One of the hallmarks of a genuine believer is that when he does sin it grieves him. Arthur W. Pink writes:

The nature of Christ's salvation is woefully misrepresented by the present-day evangelist. He announces a savior from hell rather than a savior from sin. And that is why so many are fatally deceived, for there are multitudes who wish to escape the Lake of Fire who have no desire to be delivered from their carnality and worldliness.²

It is good and it is right to warn people to flee from the wrath to come. But just as much as we should want deliverance from hell, we should want deliverance from sin. We should have a godly sorrow over our sins ([2 Corinthians 7:9-11](#)). When we sin, it should grieve us because we understand that our sin grieves God. The gospel delivers us from our love of sin to a love for holiness.

This deliverance from our fallen affections leads to a deliverance toward holiness and sanctification. In 1 Corinthians 6, the Apostle Paul gives a long list of sins which mark the lives of unbelievers: fornication, idolatry, covetousness, drunkenness, homosexuality, theft, reviling and swindling. Such people will not inherit the kingdom of God. Then Paul says, "Such were some of you" (vs. 11). Notice the past tense. His readers were those things, but they are not anymore. We can no more speak, for example, of a gay Christian than we could of a murdering Christian. Christians do not have their identity in sin, but in Christ.

Paul then says, "but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (vs. 11). Notice these three terms: washed, sanctified, and justified. The two bookend terms, "washed" and "justified," deal with the new birth, salvation. The term in the middle, "sanctified," deals with the believer's personal growth and conformity into the image of Christ. Those whom God saves, He sanctifies. There are no exceptions to this. Where there is no sanctification, there has been no salvation. It is a package deal. The initial, definitive sanctification that occurs at conversion continues throughout the believer's life until glorification.

We are delivered into a new family – The new birth gives us a new family. Those who receive Christ are "given the right to become the children of God" ([John 1:12](#)) and have "received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" ([Romans 8:15](#)). That is a staggering reality. God takes those who were formerly His enemies, delivers them from sin and adopts them into His own family. Consider this passage from Matthew's gospel:

"While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. Someone said to Him, 'Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.' But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, 'Who is My mother and who are My brothers?' And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother'" ([Matt. 12:46-50](#)).

Many of us have experienced a strain in relationships or even alienation from members of our family after conversion to Christ. What a comfort this passage is in such times. Our salvation may

result in alienation from our blood family but we also gain a new family – and a big one at that. We instantly gain millions of brothers and sisters in Christ scattered all over the world.

This brings me to one aspect of the social justice movement that deeply grieves my heart. The message from many in this camp is that the gospel is sufficient to cleanse one's conscience and turn one's behavior from adultery, theft, fornication, blasphemy, etc., – but not racism! To deal with racism the big guns must be brought to bear. I do not understand such thinking.

One of the great blessings that has been mine as an evangelist is that God has granted me opportunities, as of this writing, to preach in 25 countries. I have preached in countries throughout Central America, South America, Europe, Africa, Australia, and Asia. It does not matter what country I am in, with what culture I am surrounded, how much or how little material belongings the people have, or even what language is spoken, when I am with like-minded believers in Christ there is an instant bond, an instant kindred spirit, an instant fellowship and an instant love between us.

Another thing that does not matter is ethnicity. I do not care what color their skin is nor do they care what color mine is. I have never been in a church overseas and had the thought, 'They really need more white people in here.' I have never once felt unwelcome. We do not mistrust one another. We love one another. Even though we may have just met for the first time I have an instant love for them and they for me – because we are *family*. And because we have all been delivered from Adam's family into the family of God, none of these superficial differences matter. The dividing wall has been broken down ([Ephesians 2:13-19](#)) and we are all one in Christ Jesus ([Galatians 3:28](#)).

Salvation is deliverance. Glorious and beautiful deliverance. We have been delivered from the dead and made alive in Christ ([Colossians 2:13](#)). We have been delivered from sin and its deadly hold on our hearts. We have been delivered into the family of God where superficial differences matter not. And, we will one day be delivered and presented to the Son as a love gift from the Father where we will enjoy Him and glorify Him forever ([John 6:37; 17:2, 9, 24](#)) all "to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" ([Ephesians 1:6](#)).

1. This in no way diminishes man's responsibility and accountability before God. God is sovereign and man is responsible. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are twin truths that, at times, are even seen in the same passage. See for example: [Matt. 11:27-28](#); [Acts 2:23](#).
2. Pink, Arthur W. "A. W. Pink's Studies in the Scriptures," pg. 373. Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001.