

“Biblical Justice, Part 4: Where & Who?”
Micah 3-4
September 5, 2021
Faith Presbyterian Church – Evening Service
Pastor Nicoletti

We return again this evening to our parenthetical mini-series on biblical justice, in the middle of our larger series on the Book of Micah. This is our fourth sermon on this topic, which we have paused on, in the middle of our study of Micah. As we seek a better biblical understanding of societal justice and our responsibility in it, so that we can better know how to apply Micah’s words about societal injustice to our own lives.

In our first sermon on this subject, back in May, we observed that we do not currently, as a society, have a shared vision for what societal justice is. We looked at how the most common theories of justice around us – the postmodern or critical theory, the utilitarian theory, the liberal theory, and the libertarian theory – are all rooted in secular humanism.

In the second sermon we began to consider a biblical theory of justice, rooted not in some principle or some aspect of human nature, but in the character of God himself. Within God’s character as described in the Scriptures we especially focused on the two major aspects of God’s justice: his retributive justice by which he renders just punishment to those who do evil, and his remunerative justice by which he gives good rewards to those who do good.

From there we noted that God’s justice – both his retributive justice that punishes evil and his remunerative justice that rewards and protects good – is supposed to be present in society. Neither comes about naturally in a fallen world, and so both must be sought intentionally.

Which led then to our third sermon in this topic, which focused on corporate responsibility for justice – the fact that we are responsible to work for justice not only in our individual lives and actions, but we are also responsible to advocate for justice in the communities and the societies we are a part of. And we considered six different theses on this topic, concluding with the fact that while the topic of corporate responsibility is complex, at the end of the day, biblical justice still calls us to work for justice in the communities and society that we are a part of.

Which led to the question of *how* we are to do that. We are not kings or queens. We can’t unilaterally make things happen. And so how are we to proceed with this calling, as ordinary members of institutions and ordinary citizens of our country? What are our next steps?

That is the question we will begin to address tonight. But we’ll only begin to address it. Based on twelve action items given in Tim Keller’s recent articles on justice (which I have been drawing from for this series, and will continue to draw from tonight, along with several other resources), I was planning to end this mini-series on justice by summarizing them all together. Not surprisingly, I took on a bit more than I can handle in one sermon. And so I’ll try instead to cover the same ground in three sermons.

Tonight we will seek to answer the questions: “Where?” and “Who?” Next time we will ask “When?” And in the final sermon we will address the question “How?”

So, tonight we consider “Where?” and “Who?”: Where are we to work for justice? And “Who is to work for justice?”

With those questions in mind, let’s hear now from our text: Micah 3:1-4:5.

Our sermon tonight is a topical one, but this text will provide us with a starting point.

So please do listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this evening.

^{3:1} And I said:

Hear, you heads of Jacob

and rulers of the house of Israel!

Is it not for you to know justice?—

² you who hate the good and love the evil,

who tear the skin from off my people

and their flesh from off their bones,

³ who eat the flesh of my people,

and flay their skin from off them,

and break their bones in pieces

and chop them up like meat in a pot,

like flesh in a cauldron.

⁴ Then they will cry to Yahweh,

but he will not answer them;

he will hide his face from them at that time,

because they have made their deeds evil.

⁵ Thus says Yahweh concerning the prophets

who lead my people astray,

who cry “Peace”

when they have something to eat,

but declare war against him

who puts nothing into their mouths.

⁶ Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision,

and darkness to you, without divination.

The sun shall go down on the prophets,

and the day shall be black over them;

⁷ the seers shall be disgraced,

and the diviners put to shame;

they shall all cover their lips,

for there is no answer from God.

⁸ But as for me, I am filled with power,

with the Spirit of Yahweh,

and with justice and might,
to declare to Jacob his transgression
and to Israel his sin.

⁹ Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob
and rulers of the house of Israel,
who detest justice
and make crooked all that is straight,
¹⁰ who build Zion with blood
and Jerusalem with iniquity.
¹¹ Its heads give judgment for a bribe;
its priests teach for a price;
its prophets practice divination for money;
yet they lean on Yahweh and say,
“Is not Yahweh in the midst of us?
No disaster shall come upon us.”
¹² Therefore because of you
Zion shall be plowed as a field;
Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,
and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

^{4:1} It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of Yahweh
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and it shall be lifted up above the hills;
and peoples shall flow to it,
² and many nations shall come, and say:
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.
³ He shall judge between many peoples,
and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore;
⁴ but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree,
and no one shall make them afraid,
for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken.
⁵ For all the peoples walk
each in the name of its god,
but we will walk in the name of Yahweh our God
forever and ever.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

Where Are We to Work for Justice?

So we begin with the question “Where?”

Where are we to work for justice?

And our answer will be: First in the Church, then in the world. [Keller, “Justice in the Bible”]

Now, there are other tendencies out there.

Some folks want to restrict the work for justice to the Church because they conclude that the world is going to hell anyway, so why bother. Let’s just focus on making the Church as good as we can.

Of course, as we already considered this morning, the Church does not exist for itself. The Church is sent out in mission. As he promised to Abraham, our presence is supposed to be a blessing to all families and all nations, as we seek to love all our neighbors, and in doing so, point to God’s love, and mercy, and justice.

Other folks want to restrict the work of justice to the Church because they see the Church as too flawed to have much to say to the unbelieving world.

But again, this does not fit with the Scriptures themselves. The Bible is not shy in describing the flaws of the people of God. And yet, throughout their history, God still called them not just to improve themselves, but to work for the goods of others. And God worked through them, even when they were flawed.

Still other folks tend to want to focus the work of justice only on the world. In their mind, the Church is doing pretty well – especially when compared to the world. And so, when people point out injustices in the Church, their response will often be to deny those claims, or just point out that things are at least better in the Church than in the world.

And yet, this view also is out of step with the Scriptures. It was a common observation in the Old Testament that the pagan nations around Israel were more sinful and unjust than Israel was. And yet, that did not stop God from bringing judgment on Israel using those very same nations. Being more just than pagans is not the standard God has set for his people. And we cannot assume that the Church is acting more righteously than the pagan world in every area of life. Even in the days of the Apostles, the Apostle Paul could state that the church in Corinth was tolerating sin that not even the pagans would have tolerated! [1 Cor 5:1] And so, we cannot limit our critiques of injustice to the unbelieving world.

Instead, we must work first in the Church and then in the world.

By which we mean that we are called to work in both, with our first priority being to work for justice among the people of God, and our next priority being to work for justice out in the world.

The Church is to be our first priority for a couple reasons.

First, it is because we do have a greater responsibility to it. In Galatians 6:10, the Apostle Paul says to the church “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” For Paul, when it comes to doing good in the Church or in the world, it’s not one or the other, but it’s both – it’s “everyone” – while at the very same time it is “especially” the household of faith, because we have an even greater responsibility.

But a second reason for that is one of credibility. How can we critique and try to change the world, when we have not even gotten our own house in order?

So we begin with the Church. Which means we need to begin by asking how we treat one another. How do we speak to and about one another? How fairly do we treat others in the Church?

And especially how do we treat those with less power? How do we treat the poor, or those struggling financially? Are we generous? Do we seek the sort of remunerative justice that we see described in the Old Testament, where we give to the poor among us, and provide for those in need, as if the money was their right – just as described in the gleaning laws we discussed a few sermons ago? And don’t think about other people here – but what is *your* attitude towards the financial needs of others in the church?

And what about other groups that tend to have less power? How do we treat women? Are they heard? Are their concerns treated as if they matter? Are their insights acknowledged as valuable?

How do we treat those of other races among us? How do we react to other congregations that have a majority of people from different races than we are? How do we respond to their voices and their perspectives?

How do we treat children? How do we care for them? They are, after all, those who are less powerful than the adults in the room.

These should be concerns for us as we work for justice – for the biblical idea of justice, rooted in God’s character – within our own church.

Because working for justice in the church is to be our first priority.

But then we also must work for those same things in the world.

And we see that movement from the Church to the world in our text.

The text begins with God's people – with Israel, the Church. In verse one: "Hear, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Is it not for you to know justice?"

In verses two and three, Micah says that it is like the leaders of God's people are consuming God's people – eating their flesh, chopping them up like meat in a pot. They care only for their own advantage, we read in verse five. And so, God will bring judgment, we read in the verses that follow, because there should be justice among God's people.

But then, in chapter four, we see that the long-term plan is for that justice to extend. Now, we are not doing a detailed exegesis of chapter four tonight, but just notice the overall shape. In verses one and two the people are coming into Zion – into the city of the people of God. And why? Because we read at the end of verse two "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem." The just law of God goes out. In verse three we read that the judgments of God are bearing on nations far away.

Our text is one more reminder of God's calling for his people to bring the truth and the justice that is rooted in God's character out among us, and then out into the world.

So where are we supposed to work for justice? First in the Church, then in the world.

Who Is to Work for Justice?

That then brings us to our second question: Who? Who is to work for justice?

That might seem like a dumb question at first, because we've emphasized in our previous sermons that everyone is called to work for justice as they are able.

Well, what I mean is not really "who" in terms of persons, so much as "who" in terms of office, or position, or standing. Who, in what sort of capacity, is to work for justice?

I mean, is that mainly the pastors' job? The elders? The deacons? Should the deacons be putting funds towards political causes? Should the elders be leading legislative initiatives? Should I, as your pastor, try to run for governor? If the Church is supposed to work for justice in itself and in the world, then ... in what capacity is the Church called to that sort of work? The Church in what form? That's the question we need to ask.

And to answer it, we need to spend some time discussing two categories for the Church that were developed and popularized by the nineteenth-century Dutch theologian and political leader Abraham Kuyper.

We need to talk about the Church as institution versus the Church as organism.

Now, what follows will be rooted in Kuyper, though not every aspect of Kuyper's thinking on these categories, and with some critiques, refinements, and adjustments from Herman Bavinck,

Daniel Strange, and Tim Keller. [See notes for Strange and Keller articles. Bavinck's input includes Bavinck, 4.332 (§497)]

John Bolt summarized the two categories in Kuyper's thinking like this: The Church as an institution is "the body of Christ gathered around word and sacrament for worship and discipline" while the Church as an organism is "the body of Christ in the totality of its multidimensional vocations in the world." [Quoted in Strange, 429]

We might need a bit more clarification than that.

Kuyper draws this distinction out in part by considering the kind of metaphors the Bible uses to describe the Church. The first set of metaphors are organic: the Church is described as a tree, as a vine, as yeast, or as a body. God gives it life and growth and the Church is an organic thing.

A second set of metaphors "draw not from nature but from the work of human hands" he says. The Church is described as a house, or a temple, or a city. It not only grows, but is built.

Kuyper sees in this distinction two aspects of the Church. One is the life of the community of believers: the Church as an organism. The other is the Church as an intentionally built and shaped and governed organization: the Church as an institution.

The two are distinct, but Kuyper notes that Scripture refuses to let them be separated. After all, the Bible also speaks of the Church as "living stones," and as plants that are sown by a sower. [Kuyper, 4-6]

Now, we can debate Kuyper's exegesis of the parables, but even aside from them the distinction seems to be sound and helpful. There is a difference between the Church gathered under its officers to receive the means of grace or the discipline of its elders on the one hand, and the Church as a communion of believers, gathered for some other purpose together, or scattered about their callings in the world. [Kuyper, 7-8] And their roles are not always the same.

Kuyper explains that the Church as institution is established to feed and to expand the Church as organism. [14] And it is precisely this role of "nurturing" the Church as organism "that renders the institution [of the Church] absolutely indispensable." [16]

Now, this distinction is *not* the same as the distinction between the visible and invisible church, but rather it is a distinction within the visible church. [Bavinck, 4.330 (§497); WCF 25.1-3; WLC #61-65; Strange, 438]

And so, when you gather with other Christians in your home for fellowship ... or meet with other Christians for prayer or Bible study ... or you form an independent Christian school with other believers, is that a gathering of or a ministry of the Church? Well, yes – it is. Even if there's not a church officer in sight. It is a gathering or a work of the organic church, rather than the institutional church.

And the organic Church often has its own power dynamics as well. One of my professors in seminary liked to tell us that when we arrive at our first pastorate, we may think that because of our degree or our ordination or our installation to church office, that we have the power. But, he said, usually there will be some older woman in the church, who has taught Sunday school to every second grader for the last forty years. And the fact is, she is much more powerful than you. What did he mean? Well, the pastor may have the formal power in the church as an institution. But a woman like that has the informal power in the church as an organism. And that kind of informal power often trumps formal institutional power.

All of this helps get at the distinction between the Church as an organism and the Church as an institution.

How then does this apply to the question of working for justice?

Well, the question for us is: Which form of the Church is the one that is supposed to do that? Which form of the Church is called to actively work for justice, first within the Church, and then within the wider world?

Let's start by considering work for justice within the Church itself. Is that the responsibility of the Church as institution or the Church as organism?

Well, in most cases, it would seem to be the responsibility of both, ideally working together. Both the pastors and the session, and also the congregation as a whole, have a responsibility to work towards our church gatherings and our institution being places of justice. And ideally those aspects of the church would work together, each contributing to the work.

Let me give a very real example of that right now in the life of our church. Let's think for a minute about our revised child protection policy which is just now going into effect this fall.

Now, first a disclaimer about what I'm not saying. I know some folks have struggled with the new policy. And some folks have given us negative feedback or constructive criticism. I am NOT saying that those folks don't care about protecting children from abuse, and I'm NOT saying that those folks don't care about justice. Not at all. Some of the constructive criticism has been very helpful. And all of the dialogue is helpful for us. In fact, that's one of the points I'm about to make. So my example is not meant to be a veiled criticism of anyone, but it's more about what our goals have been with the policy, and how the process has worked between the church as institution and the church as organism.

Now, there are a lot of reasons we have sought to revise our old policy. The change was NOT brought on by an incident or anything like that, but by a recognition that we could improve the policy we already had. There are several benefits to do this. One is that a more set policy helps visitors and people new to the church (who don't know everyone personally) feel more comfortable entrusting their children to our ministries. Another is that such a policy protects our volunteers from the possibility of a false accusation. Those are important. But neither was the main motivator.

The main motivator, in a sense, was justice. Child abuse is a real issue. It's an issue out in the world. It's an issue in the Church at large. And part of our responsibility to justice is to do what we can to provide a safe environment for children. That is something we owe them according to a biblical concept of justice.

We are called to care for all people, but especially for those who cannot defend or cannot speak for themselves. And children often fall into this category. And so part of how we work for justice is, to the best of our ability, protect children from abuse in our church and in our ministries.

And so, our approach to this issue is, I think, a justice issue within the church. Which is why it is interesting to consider how the revision came about.

Well, if my memory serves correctly, it began with input from the church as organism. Some of us elders and pastors began to hear from congregants about ways that we might further improve our child protection policies and procedures. That is what got the ball rolling – the organic church seeking more robust protection of justice, in conversation with the institutional church.

And around the same time, a similar process was going on on a larger scale in the Church. Advocates and organizations – expressions of the organic church – have, over the past few years, been coming to denominational leaders – the institutional church – and explaining to them the risk and prevalence of child abuse in the church, and advocating for best practices in the church. Organization's like G.R.A.C.E., founded by Boz Tchividjian (Billy Graham's grandson), or the work of Rachael Denhollander in conversation with church leaders like Al Mohler [see Mohler in bibliography] are just a couple examples of this.

Similarly, in our own denomination, in 2019, our general assembly hosted a seminar by MinistrySafe on the topic of child abuse within the church, in which the attorney Kimberlee Norris discussed abuse within the church, presented us with statistics and case studies, and discussion of the effects on victims, and the ways churches and church leaders often miss abuse when they are not educated on it, and when good policies are not in place. Because of this ministry of the organic church, we leaders of the institutional church walked away with a deeper understanding of what seeking justice in our setting would look like.

With input from the organic church, both within our congregation and at a national scale, the session, the church as institution, had begun the process of revising our policy. And for help we turned, again, to outside organizations for some help – organizations with more expertise than we have. With them we compiled a draft of our revised policy. The session reviewed that draft, and then sent it out to others in the church – to Sunday school teachers, leaders of our women's ministry, and others, seeking input from them. As the institutional church, we were again seeking input from the organic church. Finally, after revisions based on that input, we brought the revised draft to the session as a whole, discussed it at length, and voted to adopt it.

I'm sure there will be further revisions as we go. I'm sure we will continue to get helpful feedback. But our goal, however it's been executed, is justice within the church – protection for those who often cannot protect themselves. And the way we have pursued that has not been

limited to either the institutional church in the officers, or the organic church in advocates within or outside of our congregation. Instead, it has been both aspects of the church, working together.

Because both the institution and the organism have a responsibility to work, and to advocate, and to make sacrifices for justice within our church – for the protection of the powerless. That often means sacrifices. Some of those sacrifices are tedious. Some are frustrating.

But ... when I think about it ... I know our administrative staff and our officers follow a lot of frustrating and tedious procedures to make sure we manage the money entrusted to us justly – to make sure it is not abused or misused. And so it seems that however frustrating it may be at times, it's not too much to add similarly tedious procedures to make sure we manage the children entrusted to us justly – ensuring that they are not abused or misused either.

And in both cases, we do that well with the combined work of the organic and the institutional Church.

That is within the Church. But what about out in the world? How is the Church to advocate for justice out in the world?

And it's there that we see more of a division of labor between the institutional and the organic church.

When it comes to work out in the world, and when it comes to bringing change to society, it is the organic church that is called to the front lines, Kuyper argues, while the primary task of the institutional church is to make disciples, and to form and equip those disciples in such a way that they will go out into the world to do justice. [Keller, "Justice in the Bible"]

Kuyper uses a metaphor to describe this.

The world, Kuyper says, is the arena – it's the battlefield. And "far from being that battlefield itself," he writes, "the church is rather like the army tent of the Lord where soldiers strengthen themselves before that battle, where they treat their wounds after the battle, and where one who has become 'prisoner by the sword of the Word' is fed at the table of the Lord." [Kuyper, 22]

Kuyper is describing the church as institution here – that is the army tent – or the army camp. It's here, in the institutional church, that the soldiers come to have their wounds tended. Here is where the soldiers are educated to understand their goals and their enemies. Here is where soldiers are trained for the battle. And then, having received that in the institutional church, the organic church goes out, into the world, to witness to Christ, to contend for the faith, and to work for justice – to carry out the mission of God.

That happens on a large scale of our lives. It happens on a weekly scale as well. We gather here, on the Lord's Day, called together as the institutional church. Together, as his people, we are cleansed by his grace. We are instructed by his word. We are fed at his table. He heals us, he binds up our wounds, he trains us and instructs us. And then he sends us back out – out as the

church as organism, into our homes, into our neighborhoods, into our workplaces, into the world, to do his work. Which includes the work of seeking justice in the places he has put us.

When considering the Church as an organism, Kuyper writes: “Above all, let our church not ignore the great social issues [...]. The church especially must battle against sin; especially the church has the calling to support the relative right of the lower class over against the spirit of the times. Let whatever is oppressed have the church’s support.” [Kuyper, 33] The church as organism is to be actively engaged in advocating for justice for those around us.

When considering the Church as institution, Kuyper exhorts the Church’s officers, saying to them: “Building up the congregation spiritually, feeding her with the Word of the Lord, remains our first calling in every battle.” [Kuyper, 38]

There is a division of labor here. And that division exists for a few reasons.

Some of it is practical. On a practical level, church leaders often lack expertise in areas where justice is needed. They may be able to point to the overall Biblical direction of justice in a particular area of life or society, but other Christians will often be more equipped than they are to work out the details on the ground. [Keller, “Justice in the Bible”]

Another practical reason for this division is that without it, the institutional Church can lose its direction. It can be taken up in these projects, and its work around the means of grace can get lost. [Keller, “Justice in the Bible”]

Yet another reason for this division is that without it, the institutional Church can become partisan. Even when Christians agree on a goal of justice, they can disagree on the best way to get there. Christians can be on different sides of a political split, even as they work for the same just goal. It is usually best for the institutional Church not to take partisan sides in such cases, but to equip its members – the organic church – to make those decisions themselves.

This division will often mean that Christians join together to form separate organizations to pursue these sorts of things. And in fact, that is what we see in ministries like CareNet, or the Tacoma Rescue Mission, or a number of other ministries.

Other times it may mean Christians work with and within other organizations – maybe even non-Christian organizations, as what Francis Schaeffer called “co-belligerents” with non-Christians, working together for justice on a certain issue, even as they disagree on ultimate things, they can join together on that issue.

But the point is that the front-line work is done by the Church as organism. The Church as institution doesn’t need to draft a decree on the best way to address every social issue. It isn’t called to fund political campaigns or organize political action. It is called to shape and equip disciples of Jesus Christ who then go out and do that work.

Now, that doesn’t mean the Church as institution is supposed to tip-toe around controversial justice issues. Not at all. We are to call sin sin, and to call righteousness righteousness. We are to

speak in a way that equips believers to do that work in the world, providing a Biblical perspective, a Biblical worldview, and a Biblical sense of urgency on the calling of the people of God in the world.

But it does mean that the burden of that actual work falls largely to you. You need to ask if and where God may be calling you to such work, in the world, and in the lives of those around you. It could be in ways that are big, or it could be in ways that are small.

Now, at this point, we also need to note that this division of labor is not a law. It draws from theological concepts, and it seeks to draw from historic wisdom and insight, but it is not a law. There are exceptions.

Sometimes there is overlap. We, of course, run a school, which is not really a justice ministry, though it's not something that needs to be under church oversight. Our denomination similarly runs a college and a seminary. And beyond our regular diaconal work, we as a church have run other mercy ministries that minister to the needs of others around us. None of this is wrong. All of this, I would say, is good.

But it's helpful to note that even in those cases, the officers of the Church more often provide support and oversight for these ministries, rather than running the details of them themselves, as officers. There is a recognition that while it may be wise for the church to provide that support that helps the ministry go, and oversight that keeps the ministry on its mission ... on the foundation of that support and under the umbrella of that oversight, the ministry is largely a work of the organic church, within the institutional church. That arrangement can function in a variety of ways.

Still other times, extreme circumstances may call for the church as institution to pursue justice in their setting in the world, directly.

Tim Keller notes that as important as the distinction between the institutional and organic church is, even so, "it applies," he writes, "in different degrees depending on the state of society. In times of social crisis – such as Nazi Germany – the church necessarily must institutionally take political stands." [Keller, "Justice in the Bible"]

That can happen in times of crisis. And some parts of the church have had to deal with more crisis than others. As Esau McCaulley comments, the black church in America – started in the time of slavery, continued in the era of segregation – the black church, he explains, has not "had the luxury of separating [their] faith from political action." [McCaulley, 49]

Our own Westminster Confession seems to acknowledge these sorts of exceptions. It doesn't deal with this question directly, but when it speaks to the role of church synods and councils, it says that such ecclesiastical bodies are not to "intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth." But then it adds that there are exceptions, when the church is asked for its opinion by the civil magistrates, but also when the institutional church decides they must petition the civil authorities on an issue because it is an extraordinary case. While the Confession

is focused on synods and councils, a similar concept might be applied to the institutional church in general.

Now ... when it comes to exceptions, what constitutes an “extraordinary” case?

That’s a good question. One that is left to wisdom, and invariably to disagreement.

In this way, the division of labor between the institutional and the organic church, when it comes to the work of justice in the world, can feel a bit like how Captain Barbosa describes the “Pirates Code” in the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean*. “The code,” he says, “is more what you call ‘guidelines’ than actual rules ...” [Thank you to Dr. Jack Collins for this illustration]

These are not rigid theological rules. But they are wise guidelines, rooted in real theological distinctions, and developed in the Reformed tradition as the Church has struggled over centuries to carry out its mission in the world while maintaining its focus on the spiritual calling of the Church around the means of grace.

And so they are a good default guidelines for us as well.

When we get frustrated that the Church is not endorsing a candidate in an upcoming election, or throwing its support behind the party platform we like, or pressing a specific policy initiative we think would be good for our society, we should remember that that may be our role, and it may be the role of Christians working together as the Church as an organism ... but it may not be the appropriate calling for the Church as an institution.

And on the other hand, when we get frustrated that the Church is talking about current issues, and pressing us to think about how the Bible’s commands apply to the social challenges of our day, and confronting us with how the Bible’s concept of justice doesn’t quite match ours, or bringing up struggles out in the world when we would rather be thinking only about heaven, then we need to remember that it *is* the calling of the institutional Church to equip, and train, and prepare the organic Church to engage with those issues of justice in the world, and to do it well.

Conclusion

Where are we to work for societal justice?

First in the Church, and then in the world.

Who is called to that work?

In the Church, the Church as organism and the Church as institution are to work together, both pursuing justice within the community of the people of God.

In the world, ordinarily the Church as institution is to equip the Church as organism to go out, and work for justice.

That tells us where we are called to this work, and who is called to do it.

But what sort of timeline should we expect when it comes to seeing progress? And how should we pursue the work itself?

We'll return to those questions in the next two sermons.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

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