

The Proper Christian Program for Social Renewal

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SOCIAL RENEWAL GOD'S WAY

I do not wish readers to interpret my writings as saying that I do not care about the welfare of my community at all and if it burns down, then so be it. There is a biblical manner to change society for the better and increase the spiritual, economic, educational, physical welfare of all peoples. After all, let us not forget that Christians were primary leaders in the abolitionist movement. Christians created all the major educational institutions in this country. Christians were responsible for having built almost all of the hospitals in Africa. Christians were responsible for instilling the notion of human rights in our moral system. Christians were pioneers in the establishing of social welfare programs and orphanages. Christians have done such services for society as ending slave trade to staving off political revolutions.

However, what many Christians do not understand, or refuse to understand, is that these are side-effects of the Great Commission, not the goal of the Great Commission. To give you an analogy: a runner who wants the trophy must run to the finish line. The finish line is the goal, the trophy is the prize. If he were to run to the trophy table where the trophy is in an attempt to obtain the trophy, he would be disqualified from the race. You run to the goal and get the prize *as a result*. You do not run to the prize, you would get disqualified.

Spiritually, this principle must be recognized in our conversation about social reform of any kind. The world right now operates within the framework of “change the system, and you can make life better.” This is fundamentally flawed because it denies the sinful nature of man. Biblically speaking, the greatest obstacle to societal flourishing is not inadequate laws, but the sinful nature of man.

Take Israel, for example: The Mosaic Law given to Israel was perfect (Ps. 19:7-9). Its commands proscribed moral behavior, religious norms, and civil-societal expectations. Israel was a theocracy; thus, her laws were spiritual *and* political. And *all* of it is perfect – as a Christian, you are not allowed to disagree with this. And yet, Israel's history is one of apostasy, moral corruption, and calamities – generation after generations. They changed their political structure. They changed dynasties. They changed kings. They changed political allies. And yet they failed over and over again. The law was not able to save them. Even though they had a perfect set of laws, they still never had a just society. The problem was not ultimately the system or the institutions, the problem was the sin in the heart of man.

That's why Jesus had to come and die on a cross. God had always been, and he always will be, concerned about having a just and righteous society. But in order to establish a just society, he needed to deal with the *sin* of the people in the society. Jesus came and paid for our sins on the cross. The Holy Spirit then regenerates our hearts so that we can be the kind of righteous people who will actually *obey* the law.

The worldly way of changing society is top-down. It thinks that by changing laws and structures, society will flourish. The biblical way of changing society is bottom-up. The gospel changes individuals one by one. Then families, then neighborhoods, then cities, states, and nation. You cannot build a house without first making individual bricks.

That is why preaching the gospel and saving souls is not incompatible with social change. We preach the gospel and seek for individual regeneration. The more individual souls converted and sanctified, the more positive societal changes will follow as a natural result. But we must make sure that we pursue the goal and not the result.

SHOULD WE APPROPRIATE UNBIBLICAL IDEOLOGIES?

This brings me to another question: should Christians affirm or appropriate antibiblical organizations' methods and values, even if there are some things that they affirm? In particular, I have in mind the organization Black Lives Matter (BLM).

My answer: most definitely not.

It is one thing to affirm that the lives of black Americans are important and to be treated with dignity and respect, just like everybody else – and all Christians should affirm this; this should be taken for granted. It is altogether another thing to affirm the organization that is BLM. A survey of their official website shows various anti-biblical positions and beliefs that no Christian can affirm. Among these include

- 1) Their desire to dismantle “heteronormative thinking and beliefs,” which would seem to mean that they object to the notion that heterosexual beliefs and way of life should be considered normal and homosexual lifestyles abnormal.
- 2) Their desire to dismantle the nuclear family structure. According to BLM, it is a “western” social construct. I don't know how any person from Asia (or Latin America or Africa) can read this without scratching his or her head.
- 3) To top that off, maybe I've read too much Chinese history, but there are too many phrases and words in their statement that makes me uncomfortable. “Beautiful struggle that is restorative?” That seems to imply that political/tribal struggle itself is a necessary part of history and social equilibrium. How about the term “comrade?” Seriously, who uses the word “comrade” here in America?! I have literally never heard this term used

vernacularly in my 20+ years of being in this country. This sound like something taken straight out of Mao's Little Red Book.

Now a common argument is that we can support a movement as long as it has items that we as Christians can agree with. For example, BLM affirms freedom and justice for all. Is that a value to be affirmed as Christians? At face value, yes. However, that statement does not stand by itself. It grows out of a Marxist ideology that is incompatible with Christianity. You cannot analyze a value or an action by itself without identifying where it is growing out of.

Take the biblical example of circumcision. Paul at times forbade circumcision (Gal. 5:2). At other times, he allowed it (Acts 16:3). What accounts for this divergent practice? In the former case, the issue of circumcision was situated within the discussion of the necessity of the Mosaic Covenant (MC). Judaizers were preaching the false ideology that one must submit to the MC in order to be a Christian. Circumcision merely became one of the applications of this ideology. In submitting to circumcision, the Galatians would be submitting to the MC wholesale, which is to deny Christ. In the case with Timothy, Paul had him circumcised because the issue was not situated within a debate over the necessity of the MC. No one was saying that one had to submit to the MC in order to be saved. The situation in Acts 16 was simply one of logistical convenience. Timothy was traveling with Paul on his missionary journey, where he initially spoke at Jewish synagogues when he arrived at a city. He did not want unnecessary obstacles in gaining an audience within the Jewish synagogue, so he had Timothy circumcised. The circumcision was not an application of the MC ideology, but merely one of logistical convenience. Circumcision takes on different meaning depending on the situation.

Similarly, when it comes to racial equality, the affirmation that "black lives matter" is, at face value, appropriate and non-negotiable. But when we analyze the context in which it is affirmed, the meaning takes on a whole new dimension. The kind of racial equality being advocated today does not just pertain to legislative reforms on police conduct – which can appropriately stand as an issue in a less polarized conversation. The advocacy of "equality" today is an application of Marxist ideology. In the Galatian dilemma, Paul says that to submit to circumcision is to submit to the entire ideology behind it (Gal.5:3). Similarly, to affirm the BLM movement is to affirm the entire Marxist ideology behind it.

Some may criticize my analysis as being too heavy. Let me just put it this way: if a Neo-Nazi party started to gain political momentum next year and they affirm heterosexual marriage, they oppose abortion, they support freedom of religion, but they also believe that all people of color are inferior and should not be allowed to vote or hold office. Should you support such a movement? I do not know too many people who would affirm such a party. There are things you can affirm, but the overall movement has an ideology behind it that is anti-biblical, and to support the movement in part will de facto support it in whole.

I anticipate some familiar objections at this point, so let me try to identify them and then address them.

- 1) We cannot affirm everything a party stands for, so at the end of the day, we must pick and choose which are important and not worry about the one's we disagree with.
- 2) There are good and bad cases/items/individuals in every movement. It is inevitable. Let's not take bad examples and normalize them. Otherwise we cannot ever support a movement.

Regarding the first objection, it is true that we will never agree with everything in a movement. In fact, even in the church, rarely do individuals in a denomination agree with everything taught in that denomination. But there are primary, secondary, and tertiary issues. In regard to the BLM movement, the underlying Marxist ideology is not a small issue, it is the elephant in the room. The same can be said regarding the issue on LGBTQ and nuclear family structure.

Regarding the second objection, it is true that any movement cannot be defined by the individuals in the movement. Some violent individual protesters do not define every protester or the BLM movement as a whole. That is true. However, when you have a website with the movement's official statement of beliefs clearly written out, that is very representative of the movement. When the leaders of BLM publicly affirm that they are "trained Marxists" and that the underlying ideology of the movement is Marxist, that is very representative of the movement.

In conclusion, should we as Christians affirm justice – biblical justice – for all peoples? Yes. Should we rejoice and desire the welfare and flourishing of our own communities and nation as a whole? Yes. Should we affirm the dignity and humanity of people of every color? Yes. But the proper approach is not to be found in participating, supporting, or even "going along with" anti-biblical movements. God already has a plan to address all of these issues that we as humans deeply long for. We need to focus on the regeneration of souls, which comes through the preaching of the gospel. If we instead drink from other wells, not only will we find our efforts ineffective, but in the long run, these ideologies will destroy both the unity and doctrinal integrity of the church.