

**DETERMINING OUR PLACE IN OUR WORLD  
OR  
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY VERSUS IRRESPONSIBILITY  
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*Born-again Christians are citizens of two worlds. But when the Bible describes us as pilgrims, aliens, strangers, and ambassadors to this world, how far do we go in carrying out our responsibilities to this world? As Dispensationalists, we have been mislabeled as pessimistic, even deeply irresponsible, when it comes to social responsibility. Am I my brother's keeper today? Who is my brother? Is there a "Kingdom Ethic" for Dispensationalists today? Do my obligations, as a Dispensationalist, go beyond "rescue the perishing"? These lectures address the issue of our place in our world.*

**Introduction**

In a recent article entitled, "The Church and Social Responsibility in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," the following (typical) charge was leveled against evangelicals, and fundamentalists in particular:

Theological conservatives have a long history of social concern and activism. William Wilberforce led the battle in England to end slavery, and the momentum of his argument eventually led to slavery's defeat in America. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, organizations such as the Salvation Army and the Young Men's Christian Association were founded to spread the gospel and minister to social needs of the day. Looking at the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, one is hard-pressed to find instances where conservative Christians have addressed social concerns to any significant degree.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Christian conservatives were spending much of their energy defending biblical truth from the onslaught of liberal theology. As a result of this fighting, fundamentalists abandoned areas of activism in which liberals were highly involved, including areas of racism, social justice, and the exploitation of the labor force.

It wasn't until the 1980s that evangelicals began speaking out in appreciable numbers about racial prejudice. When evangelicals got wind of the AIDS epidemic, their knee-jerk reaction was to condemn homosexuality rather than respond with redemptive compassion toward homosexuals. This pattern of response (or nonresponse) has convinced the world that evangelicals are naturally opposed to meeting social needs.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Robert Pyne, professor of theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, related the following exchange between himself and a student in a theology class. Pyne described the conversation in

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<sup>1</sup>Bob Kennedy, "The Church and Social Responsibility in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," *Voice*, Nov/Dec 1999 (Vol 78, No 6): 27-29.

which he was challenging his student's about the church's responsibility to the poor. He writes:

I had said something in class about having an obligation to serve the needy, and this fellow challenged me afterward to prove my point from Scripture. I started with Galatians 2:10, but he said that Paul's words about "remembering the poor" only applied to those suffering in the Jerusalem church. I tried the book of Amos, but he said that was an Old Testament text that didn't apply to the church. He said that Psalm 72 and Matthew 6 provide instruction concerning the millennium, and that Matthew 25 describes standards for those who have gone through the Tribulation. He said Acts 4 merely reported (but did not endorse) the Jerusalem church's temporary practice of communal living, while James 2 was directed toward Hebrew Christians. I tried 1 John 3, but he was quick to point out that the apostle only calls us to love one another, not to love those who are in the world, and I finally said, "I'm not sure you and I are reading the same Bible." He was no longer convinced I was really a dispensationalist, but I had a bigger concern than that. I was no longer convinced he was really a Christian!<sup>2</sup>

Fundamentalists, and especially those of us who are Dispensationalists, have a bad reputation when it comes to social issues. Many African-Americans continue to associate the movement with bigoted attitudes by some of its popular teachers. Richard Quebedeaux, over two decades ago, represented the view of many critics when he said that a dispensational view of the human situation prevents one from having a meaningful social ethic.<sup>3</sup> Admit you are a dispensationalist in some gatherings and you will either be dismissed as an irrelevant fool or scorned as a passive supporter of oppression. This study deals with the subject of our place in our world, particularly why this is becoming such a "hot" issue within our circles today.

### **An Overview of Who We Are: Fundamental – Dispensational – Baptist**

Have you ever been asked by a new church member, "Why do we use 'labels' when we speak about our church?" Or, by someone outside of the church, "What is the purpose of all the adjectives? Why do you call yourselves 'Fundamental, Dispensational, Separatist Baptists'?" Have you found yourself asking, "Are all those terms really necessary? What do they mean?"

- I. Fundamental/Fundamentalist** – primarily speaks of our *view* of the scriptures: the supernaturalness, sufficiency, inerrancy of the Bible.

Many would postulate that fundamentalism speaks of their position in regard to their associations. A characteristic of modern-day fundamentalism is separation, particularly

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<sup>2</sup>Related by Bob Pyne at a meeting of the Dispensational Study Group, Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting, 1997. The thoughts for the middle sections of this paper were first generated in the study the Bob Pyne presented at that ETS meeting.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals: The Story of the Emergence of a New Generation of Evangelicals* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 27-28.

ecclesiastical separation, therefore, some define “fundamentalist” in terms of separation. Is that accurate? It is only partially correct. Historically, fundamentalism has been a movement that has been recognized for its high view of scripture, particularly in relation to supernaturalism and complete inerrancy – in all areas.

**II. Dispensational/Dispensationalist** – speaks of our *interpretation* of the scriptures: how we get our theology.

A. A literal/normal hermeneutic. One’s hermeneutic (method of interpretation of scripture) is the basis for one’s theology: how one interprets scripture ultimately determines one's theology.

B. Distinction between Israel and the church.

C. Overall purpose/scheme of history is doxological – the glory of God.

**III. Baptist** – speaks of our *practice* of the scriptures: our polity.

Bible is the only rule of faith and practice (primitivism); priesthood of all believers (soul liberty); regenerated church membership (voluntarism); support two church ordinances (baptism by immersion, Lord's supper); autonomy of the local congregation (congregational polity); separation of church and state. These principles are often referred to as Baptist distinctives – historically, these were *the distinctives* of the believer's church. Whenever you hear the term *independent* used with Baptist, as in **Independent Baptist**, the purpose is to distinguish us as a local congregation that is independent of any convention or other governing body or association.

### **Dispensationalism’s Social Disengagement**

As mentioned in the introduction, dispensationalists have a bad reputation when it comes to social issues. There are those among us who dislike that reputation, but we have to admit that it has too often been deserved, and it can be traced to some of our more common theological and historical concerns.

I. Dispensationalism was born as a separatist movement with a natural isolation from (and distrust of) existing social and ecclesiastical structures.

The majority of dispensationalist, at least the spokespersons (writers), have identified themselves as the heavenly people of God and the invisible church. By identifying themselves as such, dispensationalists were somewhat disengaged from the interests of broader society from the very beginning.

II. Dispensational premillennialism has, for the most part, maintained a pessimistic attitude

toward social progress.

Believing that the world would have to get significantly worse before the arrival of Christ made it better, many early dispensationalists had little motivation to reform the existing social order. They thought politicians were fighting a losing battle, and they believed genuine change would only come through conversion. That perspective on society further isolated dispensationalists from the rest of the American public, most of whom were increasingly optimistic about human progress at the end of the nineteenth century.

- III. Prior to 1965, dispensationalists assigned the Old Testament law, the Sermon on the Mount, and many of the ethical teachings of Jesus to other dispensations, considering them essentially unrelated to the mission and function of the church.

The church's task, they regularly emphasized, was to preach the gospel. At the same time, liberal Protestantism was headed in the opposite direction. Having concluded that central doctrines like the deity of Christ and the resurrection were not historically credible, liberals relied more heavily upon the Bible's ethical teachings as they sought to reinterpret Christianity for the modern world. Dispensationalists deemphasized the Scriptures that the liberals preferred while emphasizing the texts that the liberals rejected.

An emphasis on the gospel did appeal to American revivalists, among whom dispensationalism flourished. However, that connection further contributed to the social disengagement of dispensationalism. Revivalistic individualism deemphasized the corporate consequences of sin and distrusted cooperative reform efforts as potentially socialistic.<sup>4</sup> Again, the liberals were beginning to focus on these same concepts, and the stage was being set for the Fundamentalist–Modernist controversy, which solidified the social disengagement of most dispensationalists.

In spite of these factors, many dispensationalists were very involved in social reform from about the time of the American Civil War until the 1920s. A. J. Gordon, Arthur Pierson, William B. Riley, John R. Straton, and M. A. Matthews are a few of the individuals whose efforts have been commonly cited.<sup>5</sup> Speaking of Gordon and several others, Marsden writes,

. . . many of the same evangelist associates of Moody who took the lead in preaching dispensationalism and holiness also led in preserving the tradition of evangelical social work. Though they were dedicated first to saving souls, greatly occupied with personal

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 37, 126.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Dale W. Johnson, "Millennial Thinking and its Implications for Social Reform: Premillennialism in Urban America 1865-1925," unpublished M.A. thesis, Florida Atlantic University (Boca Raton, FL), December 1988.

piety, and held pessimistic social views, their record of Christian social service, in an era when social reform was not popular, was as impressive as that of almost any group in our country.<sup>6</sup>

Their ministries demonstrate that not all dispensationalists believed that social reform contradicted premillennial eschatology. Weber wrote,

While they all could agree that society could not be reformed in any real sense before the return of Christ, [premillennialists] did not all agree about what Christians could or should be doing for it in the meantime. Some premillennialists condemned all reform efforts as unsuitable for those who expected Christ momentarily; but others believed that until Christ does appear, Christians should engage in certain kinds of reform activity and do whatever possible to slow down the inevitable decline and breakdown of the social order.<sup>7</sup>

Some critics have said that premillennial social reformers “simply refused to accept the logic of their position and gave in to their feelings of Christian love and concern.”<sup>8</sup> Premillennialism and social reform didn’t seem nearly as incompatible before the 1920s as they did after, and from this side of the “Great Reversal” we tend to forget that they were ever friends.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Great Reversal**

How did this reversal develop? How ironic it is to look back to the early nineteenth century and observe that evangelicals (the conservatives who were the forerunners of the twentieth century fundamentalists) exercised a considerable amount of influence upon American society.<sup>10</sup> Millard Erickson writes that “as the condition of what we today call urbanization grew” there came to be “an increasing realization that the church must grapple anew with these issues.”<sup>11</sup> He then notes:

During the revival in Boston in 1842, the evangelist Edward Norris Kirk criticized the opposition to charity, noting that the same type of objection could be applied to the preaching of the gospel. Such concern for the poor spread rapidly among evangelicals.

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<sup>6</sup>Marsden, 85.

<sup>7</sup>Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 83.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Norris Magnuson, *The Gospel in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work 1865-1920* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), xv.

<sup>10</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Heart and Mind: Perspectives on Theological and Practical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 14.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

[For evangelicals] the reform of society was just as much their aim as was the regulation of personal behavior. . . . Another area in which evangelicals were active was the antislavery movement. . . . Northern evangelicals played a significant role in the cause of emancipation. . . . Outspoken in the abolitionist cause was the evangelist Charles Finney. . . . It was to a large extent the new revival movement associated with persons like Finney that produced an evangelical effort toward abolition. . . . The revival preaching of Finney and Elder Jacob Knapp emphasized the union of personal holiness with societal problems. . . . Evangelicals not only offered support to the cause of social justice and reform, but were in many cases at the forefront of it. They united the messages of personal regeneration and societal reformation. Gradually, however, the situation changed.<sup>12</sup>

When industrialization and immigration swelled the population of northern cities in the decades following the Civil War, overwhelming the existing social structures and creating pockets of severe poverty in the midst of growing national prosperity, liberalism responded with the Social Gospel. Perceiving love for one's neighbor as the central task of the church, advocates of the Social Gospel urged professing Christians to follow the example of Jesus and bring aid to the poor. Some drifted into socialism, while others built their utopian dreams on economic liberalism and American capitalism, but the movement so wedded liberal Christianity to social reform that opponents found it practically impossible to reject one without the other.

Fundamentalism, emerging during that same period as a movement opposed to liberal Protestantism, saw the Social Gospel as a humanistic denial of the faith. Reform was no substitute for regeneration, and even successful reform may be nothing more than a satanic device to lure people away from saving faith in Christ.<sup>13</sup> That perspective was particularly conducive to dispensationalism, which regarded negative social trends as signs of Jesus' coming. Dispensational fundamentalists and Social Gospel liberals could hardly have been more different in their teaching. The liberals affirmed the goodness of humanity, hoped for utopia through largely naturalistic reform, and thought the primary task of the church was to love one's neighbor. The dispensationalists believed in the universal sinfulness of humanity, hoped for a kingdom that would come solely through supernatural intervention, and thought the primary task of the church was to preach the gospel of salvation. Their major conflict, however, was apparently occasioned by something they held in common – nationalistic fervor during the first world war.

From Arno Gaebelein and R. A. Torrey to Henry Sloan Coffin and Reinhold Niebuhr, many Americans were pacifists at the beginning of the war. However, as wartime propaganda continued to demonize both the Germans and the Bolsheviks, both fundamentalists and liberals felt the need to defend their loyalty to the American cause. Unfortunately, they did so by

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 15-18.

<sup>13</sup>Writing in 1910, I. M. Haldeman said, "the Devil would be glad to see prohibition successful. Nothing would please him more than to be able to shut up every saloon and every house of shame" (*The Sign of the Times*, 199-200, in Marsden, 126).

accusing their theological opponents of treason.<sup>14</sup> Frustrated and perhaps threatened by the popularity of premillennial teachers during the war, some liberals, led by Shailer Matthews and Shirley Jackson Case, accused the premillennialists of undermining the nation's interests by preaching a message of passivity and disengagement. Some went so far as to suggest that the premillennial movement had been funded by German sources. Others took delight in observing that American liberals were obviously the ones who depended heavily on German scholarship.

Both sides had so closely associated their Christianity with their political views that they believed their theological opponents must be their political opponents as well. The same thing happened with the church's social engagement. Fundamentalists came to oppose social reform in the 1920s not primarily because they were theologically predisposed to reject the concept, but because the modernists had endorsed it so completely. The Social Gospel had become a liberal idol, and the fundamentalists would not bow before it. They focused their attention on what they believed to be more pressing concerns, but those concerns were inevitably defined by the conflict with modernism. Seeking to preserve Christian orthodoxy (and, indeed, Christian culture) fundamentalists emphasized the issues they thought the liberals had abandoned – the central doctrines of the faith, personal moral behavior, and evangelism. With their house on fire, the fundamentalists hurriedly retrieved their treasured belongings and ran for the door. In the process, they left behind a solid tradition of social ministry. Therefore, the strong association between liberalism and social reform served as the last straw for a movement already predisposed toward separatism, pessimism, and individualism. Most fundamentalists abandoned social reform because they really didn't see it as a vital part of the church's mission.

### **Fundamentalists, Dispensationalists and the Preservation of Culture**

In the 1920s and 1930s, liberalism's internal critics were starting to recognize the naivete of its utopian ideals, and its associations with prevailing political and economic systems would not survive the stresses of war and depression.<sup>15</sup> At the same time the fundamentalists own lack of involvement in social issues often constituted (at least led to) a passive endorsement of the status quo. Maintaining the nationalistic stance they adopted during the first world war, the fundamentalists saw modernism as a threat to American civil religion and the American way of life, and they associated cooperationist efforts at social reform with communism.<sup>16</sup>

With an eschatology that was pessimistic about the present age, an ecclesiology that distrusted the visible church, a view of the Law that may have led to the neglect of some of its

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<sup>14</sup>Marsden, 143-53.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Roy L. Aldrich, *The Final Apostasy Identified: A Study of the Prophetic Significance of Modernism and Neo-Orthodoxy* (Findlay, Ohio:Dunham Pub. Co., 1955).

<sup>16</sup>Robert L. Vining, "The Federal Council: Foe of Capitalism," *The Southern Presbyterian Journal* 2 (August 1943), 5-7. Cf. Athol Gill, "Christian Social Responsibility," in *The New Face of Evangelicalism: An International Symposium on the Lausanne Covenant*, edited by C. Rene Padilla (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 92-93.

ethical teachings, a revivalistic focus on individual morality, a fundamentalist rejection of the Social Gospel, a nationalistic opposition to communism, dispensationalists had plenty of reasons to be disengaged when it came to social issues.<sup>17</sup> The combination of these factors provided dispensationalists with a rationale by which to justify that disengagement. Over the years premillennial eschatology has been used to limit the work of the church to spiritual matters. For instance, Alva J. McClain argued that the church must be kept radically distinct from the kingdom, lest saints attempt to exercise their influence through political or social devices (as opposed to wholly spiritual ones).<sup>18</sup>

### **Social Responsibility Between the Times**

Having now a little more awareness of our history, we need to consider briefly our expectations for the church's role within society. Traditional dispensational theology has not demanded social disengagement, but it has not been known for its social involvement.<sup>19</sup> It will be interesting to see whether or not today's dispensationalists become more socially engaged than their predecessors in the years ahead. Three factors seem to indicate that may be the case. First, by occupying something of a middle ground between the "Kingdom now" view of liberalism and the "Kingdom then" view of earlier premillennialists, the eschatology of many

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<sup>17</sup>It is not a slip on this writer's part that the terms fundamentalism and dispensationalism are being used almost interchangeably. Since the early sixties fundamentalism has become a rather specific self-designation. Though outsiders to the movement sometimes use the term broadly to designate any militant conservative (religious or political), those who call themselves fundamentalists are (and have been for nearly half a century) predominantly separatist, Baptist (at least baptistic) dispensationalists.

<sup>18</sup>Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), 438. McClain writes: "Theological confusion, especially in matters which have to do with the Church, will inevitably produce consequences which are of grave practical concern. . . . But practically, once the Church becomes the Kingdom in any realistic sense, it is impossible to draw any clear line between principles and their implementation through political and social devices."

<sup>19</sup>In recent years progressive dispensationalists have been promoting a more active social role for the church. By suggesting that the church is an inaugurated expression of the kingdom of God, one that consists of both Jews and Gentiles, progressive dispensationalists have argued that it should provide a model of reconciliation for the rest of the world. Darrell Bock wrote, "The church is to reflect the reconciliation present in the redemption over which Jesus currently presides (Eph. 2:11-22; 3:4-9). The church should lead the way when it comes to dealing with race relations; excessive nationalism; a balanced and compassionate use of resources to address human needs; personal relationships within or across gender lines; and bringing people of different social status together. The gospel is for all humanity, and reconciliation should be evident and obvious within the church. (Darrell L. Bock, "Current Messianic Activity and OT Davidic Promise: Dispensationalism, Hermeneutics, and NT Fulfillment," *Trinity Journal* 15 NS (1994): 85)

contemporary dispensationalists has become a little more optimistic and socially relevant.

Second, today dispensationalists are very likely to embrace ethical principles drawn from the law while seeking to apply the teachings of the New Testament texts like the Sermon on the Mount.

Third, the younger generation of dispensationalists have not experienced the social marginalization of their fathers. They are not as likely to distrust the visible church or the political institutions of our day. In many cases, they have become very involved in both national and local politics.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, that involvement has not always been distinctively Christian, for the political aims are usually indistinguishable from those of the non-Christian Republicans. Moreover, many of these politically active Christians desire not just to be represented, but to take over. But, is this what Christ wanted for the church in this dispensation of grace?

### **A Last Note: What Can We Say About The Kingdom and The Church?**

Is there a present aspect of the kingdom today? If there is, then we are indeed obligated to radically different social involvement than we are presently witnessing. The question that must still be answered is that of the presence of the kingdom today.

The presence of the Kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit is recorded in numerous places in the writings of the New Testament (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 1:18, 24; 2:4-5; 4:20; Heb. 6:5). The Kingdom's futurity is also clearly seen in the church after Jesus. The first question of the disciples following their forty days of instruction on the Kingdom seeks a future and particularly Jewish manifestation of the Kingdom from Jesus. "Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6)? As Jesus answers (1:7-8), their error appears not to have been a question of the nature of the Kingdom, that is, that it was or was not the traditional Old Testament hope of Israel, but it was a question of timing and the concomitant need to wisely occupy themselves until the time was right. That is, Jesus tells them, it is not for them to know the Kingdom's "when," and that in the meantime they should wait for the spiritual power to accomplish the work ahead of them.

It is also evident that Jesus' answer to their question, his last words to them before his Ascension, did not succeed in changing the disciple's understanding of the Kingdom. Peter again brings up the question of the future Kingdom for Israel in his sermon recorded in Acts 3. Addressing the absence of Jesus now, he says that the Christ must be in heaven until "the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient time" (Acts 3:21). The clear reference to the Old Testament hope of Israel's restoration shows again the correctness of the initial question of Acts 1:6 and the force of Jesus' answer

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<sup>20</sup>Evidence of New Evangelical dispensationalists mobilizing their power and influence can be seen through groups like Moral Majority, Focus on the Family, and the Christian Coalition.

then. As Jesus' answer concerned not the nature of the hope but its timing, so Peter now is explaining the new timing of the hope, not a radical reformulation of its nature. He and his Jewish brethren are still looking forward to the fulfillment of the ancient prophetic voice in Israel. *God's Kingdom for Israel was not yet there; it remained a hope for the future.*

The other mentions of the Kingdom in the New Testament also assert that the kingdom is something of the future. The Kingdom is something to be inherited (1 Cor. 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 1:12-13; James 2:5). As Jesus had taught his disciples, Paul also teaches that the reign of the believer with Christ is future (1 Cor. 4:8-13; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 4:18).

The doctrine of the Kingdom taught in the early church was one and the same as the doctrine taught by the Lord. The Old Testament hope of a messianic Kingdom on earth that would be historical and national, ethnic and universal, is revealed as coming in two stages. The first stage was the presence of a spiritual power in the Holy Spirit under the intercessory ministry of a heavenly Christ, and the second stage in the future, visible return of the Lord in his glory to reign with his saints judging and putting his enemies under his feet. Thus, we see the church as the sphere in which the coming eschatological Kingdom's power is active. Because that power is available to us believers, we should get our own house together by modeling reconciliation within the church, we should maintain an emphasis on evangelism, and we should live as empowered ambassadors of a coming kingdom.

## **Toward a Theology of Social Responsibility**

### *Observations:*

1. It is fact that the Bible does teach a “social responsibility.” This does not equate with a “social gospel.” However, the New Testament scriptures teach that as children of God, as citizens of another world, we are to live out all dimensions of our lives as biblically and Christianly as possible, though we will be counter-culture as believers.
2. The exegesis of numerous passages (i.e., Mark 12:28-34 - quote of Lev. 19:18) clearly indicates a concern for others. To be concerned for others, to aid and assist, to have a compassionate heart and then to act upon that is commended in Luke 10:25-37 (“Go and do likewise”) - the Good Samaritan.
3. It seems that throughout the New Testament era there was action taken to assist believers. This was always voluntary and never equated with salvation or sanctification.
  - a. Beginning in Acts 4 (individuals within the church)
  - b. Concern for neglected widows in Acts 6
  - c. Offering taken to assist the Jerusalem saints in Acts (II Corinthians 8-the Macedonian church)
4. It appears that obligations toward masters (employee/employer relations, Ephesians 6), government (Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1, I Timothy 2:1-2), and others are obligations we do as individuals (as responsible citizens enjoying the privileges of government protection and employment). Much of our social responsibility is performed as individual Christians and not as a corporate body (i.e., the responsibility is not equated with the local church), although commands were given in letters to churches (for the individuals making up those local bodies).
5. Based on the fact that man is created in God’s images, man is a noble creature. To be sure, sin marred that image and man is totally depraved. However, that image is not totally erased. (Therefore we have capital punishment [Genesis 9:6 and Romans 13:4] and passages such as James 3:9.) What are the ramifications of this?
  - a. Because of depravity, all men need the Savior. (Improving one’s lot in life will not necessarily make one happier.)
  - b. The common ancestry in Adam and the biblical teaching on the solidarity of the human race underscores the prohibition of all racial and national prejudices.
  - c. There is no social security apart from Christ.
6. Life in the early church was characterized by impartiality.
  - a. Whether black or Jew (Acts 13:1 - Simon/Niger in Antioch was black)
  - b. Whether rich or poor (James 2:3-6)
  - c. Whether free or slave/bond (Ephesians 6:9, Philemon 16 - slaves, but treated

properly)

7. Specifically, it is noteworthy as we see and encounter a hungry world:
  - a. Jesus did not heal everyone who was ill.
  - b. He did not feed everyone who was hungry. (He fed over 10,000 on two occasions - only one meal each - not continually.)
  - c. That does not excuse us from helping when we have resources, but those miraculous occasions were not normative of our Lord, nor are they prescriptive for us.
  
8. Politically, Jesus did not attempt to reform the Roman government. Paul did not advocate reforming the government in any epistle. What our privilege is as citizens in a democracy - as responsible citizens - should not be equated as obligation as a church. Therefore, we also find ourselves serving in the military, police departments, etc. to protect and preserve peace and stop evil.

NOTE: The apostles lived in a day of grave social problems, yet these are mentioned in the New Testament only incidentally. Never is the church directed to focus its mission on the social ills of the day. (It is interesting that the issues over which we become preoccupied and we think are unique to our day have been around for centuries. Herodotus and Thucydides, Greek historians of the fifth century B.C., said the major problems of their day included the threat of war, the breakdown of marriage and the rise of divorce, the rebellion of youth and their preoccupation with fads, the corruption of politics and the injustice in the courts, and the terrible condition of public roads.)

9. We have a duty in this world as salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16).
  - a. We impact, preserve, remain distinct, create a thirst, and serve to cure.
  - b. Our life is being made manifest (II Corinthians 5:10), and individually each of us is accountable for how we live that life.
  
10. Matthew 25:31-46 indicates that during the Tribulation, the Lord will look upon those individual acts of love for Jewish people.
  
11. Pure faith will manifest itself in action (faith without works is dead – James 2:14-18; cf. James 1:26-27). If you are not moved toward others, you must question your own state (I John 3:16-18). Yet, we cannot “fix” all of this world’s problems. Scripture reminds us that we will have the poor with us always (Mark 14:7, Deuteronomy 15:11). But remember:
  - a. There is more than one cause of poverty (
  - b. Some of the causes of poverty may be the result of a person’s bad (sinful) choices.
  - c. Other causes are because of God’s providential working (but you may not know it).
  - d. The right response should always be related to the real cause (Be humble, patient, look, ask, listen!).

e. Ultimately note that God cares for the poor and He is for His children who are poor – and so should we.

The ultimate solution to this world's problems will only come with the consummation of the kingdom. It is not here yet.