

Greetings church,

In this second chapter, Peter J. Gentry continues the work of his colleague from chapter 1 in attempting to, for lack of a better term, privatize social justice. As I noted in my review of chapter 1 the author sought to show and prove that the justice that the scriptures speak of, the justice that God is interested in, is limited to an interpersonal relationship between God Godself and each individual Christian. Here in chapter 2 Mr. Gentry doubles down on his colleagues' argument.

Mr. Gentry seeks to show, through his examination of Isaiah, that the fight against injustice is an individual endeavor and not a corporate one. He argues that Isaiah is speaking of an individual king's efforts at bringing God's justice to all the people. Thus, when the people fail to exercise and practice Godly justice, it is not the people's fault, but the king's fault. As there is no king but God, Isaiah must allude to or refer to a servant of YHWH, a suffering servant no less, who can execute God's justice where, heretofore, so many human beings have failed. "The servant of Yahweh is a coming Davidic king who will fight the battle on behalf of the nation. This final battle is not a military engagement with political overlords such as Rome but with slavery to sin, death, hell, and Satan."¹ Gentry reads Isaiah as putting no individual onus on individual people to practice justice at a societal level; justice happens on a personal level and societal justice happens because of the leader(s) of that society. Thus, before justice can be achieved at a societal level, God must be reconciled with. Which, coincidentally, is what I personally understand Jesus to have done and what the majority of Paul's letters seek to argue as well; that we have been justified and reconciled to God through Christ. I have been crucified in Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (Gal. 2:20). Is Mr. Gentry throwing out the entire Pauline corpus from the Bible?

"Unless there is reconciliation with God, there will be no social justice among humans. Put another way, reconciliation with God is fundamental and foundation to the practice of social justice in human relations. Thus, the calling of the church is to herald the good news about Jesus Christ and make disciples; we are not called to establish a Christian state."² While I wholeheartedly agree with the statement he makes after the semicolon, I disagree with what he seems to be presenting as maximalist options; it's *either* individual hearts being changed or a Christian authoritarian state akin to Iran. Why can't there be some kind of middle ground? Why can't the reality of our being reconciled to God and justified in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus lead into our continuing sanctification? Why can't part of our drawing nearer to God *include* drawing nearer to one another through the social application of laws and policies that *lead* towards more justice and equity?

Gentry concludes his contribution to the discussion stating, "Alas, the church is hardly different from the world and so fails in this regard. Christians should be focused on the social justice within the church and display this to the world in a winsome way, rather than on using politics to demand social justice of a world that has no covenant relationship with God and cannot by definition know real social justice"³ I agree that the Church has a lot of confession and repentance work that lies before it. But that confession and repentance should not preclude it from the mission that Jesus laid before her: to make disciples. In the work of making disciples the Church *teaches* a broken world what real social justice is.

¹Gentry, Peter J. *Justice in Isaiah* in Let Justice Flow Like Water: Toward a Theology of Biblical Justice. Editors Josha M. Greever, D.A. Horton, and Justin McLendon. B&H Academic, Brentwood, TN; 2025. pp 52-53

²ibid, p 55

³ibid, p 56

In Christ's Service,
Pastor Eddie