

Social Justice: The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Growing up in the 90's as a Seventh-day Adventist, there were few things more impressionable than evangelistic meetings or what many would term "Revelation Seminars." These meetings would last for weeks with the goal to bring individuals to Christ at their culmination. As an 8-12 year old child those seminars were quite daunting and foreboding. The preacher's emphasis was heavily placed on Biblical prophecies, "signs of the times," and ultimately the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

While it was a very captivating experience, I often left more confused about Jesus, and my salvation. I would think to myself, "If I have heard this stuff for years and am still confused, I cannot imagine how a visitor might feel!" Revelation Seminars seemed to be anything but a revelation – at least not a revelation of Christ. Don't get me wrong, I understand their intent and have witnessed God work on the hearts of those who sat through them. But looking back sometimes I wonder what exactly was being revealed.

A World in Need of a Revelation

We live in a time when we have unlimited and unfiltered access to information, but the least sense of direction. We can communicate with one another across the globe, and yet we feel the loneliest. There is a desire for community, belonging, and a hope that the God everyone talks about is actually real and relevant to our lives. In other words, the world (and the church for that matter) is looking for a revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Bible is replete with passages that reveal a God whose ear is tuned to and brokenhearted. Better yet, we serve a God whose heart breaks over the injustices of this world. However, the mantle has been laid on the Christian believer to make sure that the world experiences the love and power of a God that sees their plight. It is clear that the follower of Christ is primarily called to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:16-19 NIV), but how can we disciple a world that has yet to have a revelation of Jesus?

Christ Revealed to the World

The Apostle Paul provides profound insight as to how Christ is revealed to the world. In the Book of Romans Chapter 1:20 he says "For His (Jesus Christ) invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been *clearly* seen, and *understood* by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead!" In other words, the long-standing question of "is there a God?" "Who is God?" and "does God care about what takes place on earth?" can all be answered by the actions of those who claim to serve this God according to the scripture above. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we have the power to reveal the "invisible attributes, the eternal power and divine nature of God" just by how we relate to one another and the world!

Paul places more emphasis on our role in revealing God to the world when he pens Romans 8:19 (NIV) "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed." If Paul were writing in laymen terms today he would be saying "Would the real Christ followers please stand up?" If God is revealed through His creation, then there is little wonder why at this moment in Earth's history the entire creation from plant to person is under

attack. The enemy aims to suppress the revelation of God to the world! On the contrary, mankind has been ordained to facilitate the revelation of God. I submit to you that it is through acts of benevolence and a keen sense of justice that God is revealed to the world.

A Christian Code of Ethics

As a practitioner in the Social Work profession, my practice is bound by a code of ethics. As listed in the National Association of Social Workers Book of Ethics, I am bound to Service, Social Justice, Dignity and worth of the person, Importance of human relationships, Integrity, and Competence. If a secular profession can hold its practitioners to such noble standards of Righteousness and Justice, should those who stand under the banner of Christ live by anything less? Christ has in fact given us a "code of Ethics" that calls for its practitioners to not just agree with the code but to also live by the code! In fact, the primary criterion for entrance into Heaven is not based on our doctrinal subscription but on how we served those who could not help themselves (Matthew 25:35-40).

When we as the body of Christ are ready to give, that is when the Kingdom of God will receive. When we are ready to listen to the plight of the downtrodden, those same individuals will in turn become receptive to the message of a crucified and risen savior. When we are ready to extend a hand in our community, our community will make their presence felt in our midst. I believe we are called to move away from some of our traditional practices that often only yield conversion to a denomination. Now, God is calling us to move toward the practices of the early church: genuine benevolence and a pursuit of justice that yields conversions to Christ.

He's Revealed in Me

Recently, I had an encounter with a young man who was homeless. I felt led to give and as I did, he looked me in the eyes and said, "I feel so alone, confused, and misunderstood." I believe his are the sentiments of the world at large. We can no longer afford to be benefactors of a revelation of God in our own lives, and not share it with those who are seeking for it as well. The question then becomes; "how do I do my part in revealing God to the world?" Author and messenger of God, Ellen White penned a familiar statement that I believe provides a guideline for those seeking one.

In her book, *Ministry of Healing* p.143 she states "The savior *mingled* with men as one who desired their good. He *showed* His sympathy for them, ministered to their *needs* and won their confidence. Then he bade them, 'follow me.'" That passage and formula is riddled with genuine, tangible ways in which Christ revealed himself to the world. When we become more intentional about being present in the triumphs and trials of those around us, we wont need them to sit through a Revelation seminar in hopes that they see Jesus. They will have already seen him revealed through our love for them and for one another.

Social Justice and the Image of God

Often when talking about justice, we start by talking about injustice. After all, it's often the injustice that catches our attention. Whether a horrific headline, a political outrage, an unfolding disaster, or chronic problems like poverty, inequality, violence, environmental degradation or economic exploitation, these are often the things we use to initiate a call for justice.

But this is not where the Bible's many calls to justice begin. Instead, the Bible's story opens with a world that is "good" and human beings who are created in the image of God. While theologians and philosophers have long debated what specifically about human beings reflects the divine image, in most traditions in Christian history, as well as in the world's other monotheistic religions, "made in the image of God" is a foundational tenet of what it means to be human. But our reflection of God's image is also the key to our ethical responsibility for how we act toward our fellow human beings.

Empathy and the Image of God

What is appreciated but not often preached is the truth about how socially transformative, economically disruptive and politically challenging this understanding of our human origins and value are. Writing in the *Washington Post* earlier this year, columnist Michael Gerson highlighted the tensions in history between how faith has been used to diminish and to ennoble, to oppress and to liberate, to hurt and to help. He also writes how essential—and politically inconvenient—is this core formulation of human identity. "Christianity inevitably raises [this] question," he reminds us. "What if everyone we favor, and everyone we fear, and everyone we help, and everyone we exploit, and everyone we love, and everyone we hate, were the reflected image of God—unique, valuable and destined for eternity?"

To insist that all people are created in the image of God has dramatic political and practical implications. If we believe this foundational teaching of our faith in any meaningful way, much of what currently passes for political debate is simply unacceptable and unsustainable.

Putting it another way, Belinda Bauman describes this failure of belief as "the most significant barrier to empathy." In fact, she suggests that a belief in each person as the reflected image of God is how we produce true concern for others. It is a lack of faith in this belief, "the idea that *some people matter more than others*," that serves as the foundation for the perpetuation of injustice and inequality in all their forms. The reality is that some people do matter more than others—to us. We have a natural affinity for our family, friends and even community members, as we should. But we must also and always resist the temptation of assuming that others beyond our circles are of lesser value as human beings.

A Value System for Victims

Oftentimes when we are assaulted with and overwhelmed by the cumulative weight of injustice, tragedy and suffering in our world, we start to place value judgments on those who suffer. Some News media outlets operate in this way, employing a pyramid of proximity that assumes that the closer a story is to the viewer the more valuable it is. This causes a single death in our

community to somehow become more valuable than hundreds in a country whose people and policies are not like ours. These damaging classifications perpetuate the belief that people who don't look like us don't feel like us, don't hurt like us, don't grieve like us.

Compounding this human tendency are those who would cynically or even hatefully exploit our fears and prejudices for political purposes. As one unfortunate example, in recent years, my home country of Australia has contributed greatly to undermining the international framework for responding to refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced people. Damage that we now see being played out in the rhetoric and harsh practices of many other nations around the world.

Australia and Asylum Seekers

This became such an issue in Australia not because we were being overwhelmed by refugees, but because it was politically expedient. Belying the small number of people who have arrived in Australia on unregulated boats over the past two decades, this issue has been deployed politically to move the public conversation from that of a necessary and compassionate humanitarian response to a dominant and divisive political debate. This political posturing has required the implementation and progressive escalation of a regime of mandatory and indefinite detention of even legitimate asylum seekers on remote Pacific islands. This decision brings with it a great cost to Australia and great harm to many people already vulnerable and traumatized after having sought to escape danger and persecution from their countries of origin. And this shift has been observed, applauded and adopted by other political "leaders" and opportunists around the world.

While many people of faith in Australia have raised their voices in protest, it is also those politicians who have most professed Christianity who have overseen and implemented this inhumane policy. This public debate reached a new low last year when the Australian government's Minister for Home Affairs urged that "Australians must guard against compassion towards refugees"—a statement that is deeply troubling in every way. A nation warned to "guard against compassion" is being led in profoundly unhealthy and dangerous ways.

Compassion is Our First Response

So it is not hard to see why the Bible's foundational teaching about what it means to be a human being is so politically confronting and challenging. It means that we cannot use people for political point-scoring or applaud those who do. It must change how we speak, how we vote and how we live. It insists that compassion must always be our first response (compare Matthew 9:36), even when we are tempted to fear. It demands that every person matters. It urges that the surest way to respect our Creator is to care for His creation, perhaps pre-eminently His human creation: "Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but helping the poor honors him" (Proverbs 14:31, NLT). It is the foundational way of understanding our world and our highest calling for living in it. It is the recognition that our best reflection of the image of God is living with generosity, creativity, courage and love.

Integrity And The Golden Rules

In 1990, the job approval rating for Congress was 30% and in 2017, it has dropped to 19%. That is a serious decline in public confidence for our top legislative branch of government.

Members of the U.S. Senate oversee budgets in their home districts and in Washington totaling approximately \$3.5 million per member per year. Members of the House of Representatives receive approximately \$1.4 million per member per year.

[\(https://lasvegassun.com/news/2013/mar/13/how-much-does-it-cost-run-congressional-office/\)](https://lasvegassun.com/news/2013/mar/13/how-much-does-it-cost-run-congressional-office/) With 100 members in the Senate and 435 members in the House, a billion dollars flow from tax dollars in exchange for what we are receiving from these distinguished leaders.

We are long overdue for audits of these congressional offices but we see no sign of audits on the way. Some may see the lack of audits as an invitation to dishonesty, but history says that could be an invitation to failure and prison.



“The Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE) of the U.S. House of Representatives is an independent, non-partisan entity charged with reviewing allegations of misconduct against Members, officers, and staff of the U.S. House of Representatives and, when appropriate, referring matters to the House Committee on Ethics.” So, ethics relates to misconduct.

Other Working Definitions

Integrity is “firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values: incorruptibility.” The issue of integrity in public service, therefore, relates to moral values and incorruptibility. A person with integrity loves the truth and dislikes deception, cover-ups, and misleading. Ethics and integrity are required for public servants and many publications ensure members know the specifics. However, there are simple basic rules good for all humanity regardless of the social rank or class, education, profession, or aspirations.

Find five such rules below that may be reviewed in greater detail. Though the rules may be simple for all to understand, those with higher authority and

education should know that more is expected of them. They should be careful not to disappoint those expectations. Those with ambitious aspirations must give much thought to these rules to operate in different social lanes as they seek to move ahead.

1. Respect everyone's time.
2. Follow the dress code.
3. Pay attention to your behavior.
4. Be fair.
5. Be a true professional.

Ethics: Easy To Understand, Yet Underutilized

With some thought, one can expand on each to a point of perfection. She can thus achieve the success in life that the less creative thinker could never reach. And as simple as these points are, it is obvious that their consideration can benefit many. High school students with dreams can benefit as will upward-bound business executives. Community leaders can embrace them, and those who have already advanced to the top of impressive careers.

Some leaders with international influence have not learned to respect everyone's time or even to respect everyone. Some are not aware of their offensive behavior which may have seriously limited their influence. They do not realize that their achievements could have been much more impressive if they had given more thought to some of these principles.

When one stops learning and growing, those behind can see what he will never see, that his brake lights are on. He may have stumbled to the top and may be moving just enough to experience a professional train wreck. High achievers should, like others, work to avoid the weaknesses they see in others. A mayor may get too much praise to see his defects. And senators, corporate executives, and presidents get even more praise than inflated mayors.

Humility At Its Heart

This is not a complete document even for the organization that adopted it, but more of a summary. It is a good starting point for individuals or some groups which can be expanded to meet their specific needs. However, for a large group with considerable legal concerns and resources, a document such as the congressional rules, Rules, Committee on Ethics, 114th Congress, which consist of 52 pages may be a better starting point.

Ethics and integrity, therefore, require enough humility to keep everyone at every level from perceiving themselves as being above the rules. Hold on to the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12). Just as this land was made for you and me, rules were made for you and me. Let us observe them and enjoy the peace and happiness which they produce.