

Christianity at Its Best

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Introduction

Ephesians 2:14, 16 (NLT) ¹⁴For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁶Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

Matthew 22:37-38 (NIV) ³⁷Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

"It doesn't make any sense to reduce Jesus' gospel of the kingdom simply to having our sins forgiven with no regard for racial justice or hungry people being fed or refugees being welcomed, or our bodies being healed or relationships being repaired or the environment being restored. This has been the great tragedy of the evangelical church that many of us Baby Boomers have bequeathed to our children. It's the tragedy of reducing the message of the Kingdom to a message of soul salvation without regard to the material or social conditions that people are living in." (Rich Nathan)

1. God's Kingdom has always embraced _____ and _____.

Deuteronomy 10:17-18 (NIV) ¹⁷For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. ¹⁸He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.

Psalms 146:9 (NIV) The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

Proverbs 19:17 (ESV) Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.

2. God required the nation, Israel, to _____ a _____ of spirituality and compassionate justice.

Isaiah 58:1-9a (NLT) ¹Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Don't be timid. Tell my people Israel of their sins! ²Yet they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day and seem delighted to learn all about me. They act like a righteous nation that would never abandon the laws of its God. They ask me to take action on their behalf, pretending they want to be near me. ³We have fasted before You! they say. "Why aren't You impressed? We have been very hard on ourselves, and You don't even notice it!" "I will tell you why!" I respond. "It's because you are fasting to please yourselves. Even while you fast, you keep oppressing your workers.

⁴What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me. ⁵You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like reeds bending in the wind. You dress in burlap and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the LORD? ⁶No, this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. ⁷Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. ⁸Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the LORD will protect you from behind. ⁹Then when you call, the LORD will answer. 'Yes, I am here,' he will quickly reply."

3. At the core of _____, we find compassion and justice.

Luke 4:17-19 (NIV) ¹⁷The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

4. Jesus challenges _____ to do acts of compassion and justice.

Matthew 25:31-40 (NIV) ³¹"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

Conclusion