

“How the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your best wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them... Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.”¹

Shalom in the City: A Holistic Approach to Urban Ministry

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The city is a place of glamour, lights and is the heart of the arts. A weekend trip into the city often includes a movie or Broadway play as well as dinner at a fancy restaurant. Despite these well-known traits of the city, if you look closer, you will see that it is also a place of disparity and wickedness. A city is rarely described as a place of love. Rather, businessmen walk by homeless men and women, rarely giving them a second glance. Women stand on corners in high heels and revealing dresses waiting for someone to pick them up so they can make enough money to pay for their children's school clothes. Runaways get entangled in human sex trafficking because they get caught up in vulnerable situations. The depravity of the city can be seen in the bright lights, advertising exotic dancers or peep shows in broad daylight. As well as these various images of the city, the Bible also uses harsh contrasts of the city to show both a city of righteousness and blessing and the city as a wicked, immoral place at times².

Despite these harsh contrasts, breaking down barriers and understanding the biblical grounds for seeking shalom for the city, which encompasses both salvation and justice, can help us to be more effective ministers to the city. The good news of the gospel causes us to seek shalom for the city because the gospel is not mere words of

¹ Is. 1:21-23; 16-17.

² Genesis 18; Isaiah 1:26.

Christ's love, but love put into action by Christ in his humility and death of self so that, in that death, we might have life. We too are called to die to ourselves in order that we might seek shalom for others, including those caught in the depravity of the city because Jesus came not to minister to those who are healthy, but to those who are sick, not to those who are complacent in life but to those who are lost³. The gospel calls us to humble ourselves and share the gospel, which is shown not only by words or only by deeds, but rather, in both word and deed. The only way to truly proclaim the gospel is to speak it and also show it, as Micah 6:8 says, by doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with our God, which is seeking shalom for the city. Seeing the depravity of the city, we should be moved to share the hope of Christ and shalom—salvation, wellbeing, wholeness—found only in Him. This idea will be explored further below.

So what is our responsibility to the city? Should we engage culture within it or should we altogether leave the city to its own condemnation and do nothing? As we will see, the biblical model of missions and ministry to our own people, calls for us to do justice, love mercy and seek shalom, but how do we do that? As we continue, we will start to find answers to such questions, but first, we will take a quick detour into the city itself to better understand it.

The City As We Know It

In the major cities of the United States we see a diverse microcosm of American culture where Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic all congregate within the city. We see businessmen who travel into the city daily or travel in on business trips and people scrounging for jobs selling random things, such as pies or washing cars for a few bucks. We see homeless people or families who live in buildings that should be condemned and

³ Ibid., Luke 5:31; 19:10 .

rich people in penthouses rising above the city in a gentrified manner. We see people paying hundreds of dollars at fancy restaurants and people paying hundreds of dollars for the prostitute on the side of the street. We see businessmen by day and transvestite by night. The diversity of the people in the city is striking. It represents the two extremes of humanity.

Though we may not always see it, much more is going on in the city than we tend allow our eyes to see. Human Trafficking, whether by labor or sex trade, is going on right in front of us, in our own cities. Houston, a main route of I-10 and near the Mexican border, is a main hub for sex trafficking⁴. What are we doing about this? People are suffering and dying of AIDS, yet Christians tend to be either too frightened or too disgusted to do anything about it. Sin in the city is so evident, although this does not the these same things are nor found in American suburbia. Rather, the city allows us to see a more concentrated view of the depravity. Our cities are filled with sinful lifestyles of lust, passion, greed and injustice. We have become, as Isaiah 1 says, a whore. We have become like Sodom and Gomorrah and in the eyes of sinful humanity, its okay. Though many people, including non-Christians can see the problems among the city, it has become easier to accept it than change it. It is the expression of mankind in our own fallen individualism.

In the eyes of Christians, it is disgusting and against created order, yet what are we doing to help the situation, which we detest? Do we ponder these ideas and do something about it or just ignore them? As time goes on, we must look at our lives and, if we are following whole-heartedly after God, we need to challenge the current status

⁴ “HumanTrafficking.org | News & Updates: Houston, Texas Major Hub for Human Trafficking,” October 31, 2010, <http://www.humantrafficking.org/updates/807>.

quo and see if our thoughts, actions (or lack their of) and lifestyles meet his standards⁵. If the answer is no, we need to consider whether our hearts and actions need to be changed by God. Does our lifestyle reflect our concern for others? Do we spend our money on our own pleasures because we have the money to do so? Do we take the time to disciple others to live a life in the city worthy of the gospel? Many Christians will look at the situation with no hope because one person cannot change the city, while others try to help the world in its depravity by taking part in social activist groups or soup kitchens. Is there a better way to think about the problem and work to meet the city's needs? It is at this point that we must look and ask how can we best help as Christians?

The Greatest Social Need

An interesting article in *Christianity Today* asks its readers to ponder the question: “What is the Greatest Social Need?” While looking at the article title, one might assume it discusses topics of health care or the lack of jobs, yet their answer is surprising:

The greatest social need in the world today is not HIV/AIDS outreach. It's not hunger. It's not global warming. Not ending poverty or eliminating malaria or tuberculosis. Not even clean water. Not racial reconciliation. Not sexual trafficking. Not abortion. And it's not peace in the Middle East, and not even world peace... [It] is alienation from God...Of course, this alienation is much more than a social problem. It is fundamentally a spiritual problem that constitutes humanity's greatest crisis: billions of men and women who do not know the love and grace of their Creator⁶.

Oddly enough, I don't think many people, especially Americans, would have initially answered this way. It seems as though, in the modern mindset, when social needs are questioned, the economy comes to mind. Jobs are currently a huge need in society. More help for the homeless and cures for the leading causes of death, such as cancer, are all

⁵ Kevin Blue, *Practical Justice: Living Off-Center in a Self-Centered World* (IVP Books, 2006), 103.

⁶ “The Greatest Social Need | Christianity Today | A Magazine of Evangelical Conviction,” n.d., <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/january/20.18.html>.

needs in our society⁷. Regardless of the physical needs, which change from person to person, there is one need that never changes, and that is the need for Christ. Despite the current situation in life, the gospel is the one thing that everyone, no matter age, race or income, will always need. The need for the gospel is the central need for all of humanity. It is the answer to mankind's depravity and the problems of injustice in the world's cities. In order to understand this statement and to see its truth, we must first examine what the gospel really is. Is it words or is it more?

The Church and The City

Looking into the current situation of the church, we tend to see two extreme views of urban ministry. We have Christians and churches that "do good" and consider that the gospel message is not as important and then we have those who preach the gospel and offer no other help for those in need. Many churches and para-church organizations recognize the need for both but, struggle finding a balance between the two positions and so tend to one side more than another. In order to better understand the church's role, we must understand what the gospel even is. Is it more about giving a cup of cold water to someone or is it sharing the word?

St. Francis of Assisi supposedly said, "Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words." Many people quote this as having been said by St. Francis of Assisi, although many now have claimed that he never actually said it. They say that his life never proved this to be true because he was an open-air preacher and often taught others to preach repentance⁸. Nevertheless, this quote has been used over and over to

⁷ "National Vital Statistics Reports vol 50, no. 15," n.d., www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr50/nvsr50_15.pdf.

⁸ Mark Galli, "Speak the Gospel" Magazine, *Christianity Today*, May 21, 2009, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/mayweb-only/120-42.0.html?start=1>.

support a Christian ministry of actions and deeds apart from any communication of the gospel. "Preach the gospel; use words if necessary" even goes hand in hand with a postmodern assumption that words are finally empty of meaning"⁹. Christians and Non-Christians alike seem to have been unconsciously effected by this assumption. It has taken the value that was placed on preaching the gospel, by Jesus and his disciples, and brought it to a new low that actions speak louder than words. Although our actions are important, they cannot simply replace the words we should be speaking about God and gospel. It is not that we do not help and show Christ's example of love through our actions, but the Good News that was given to us was not that the poor will be helped physically. It is much more and from that message our actions should then result¹⁰. The gospel cannot be fully expressed apart from words because even non-Christians do helpful works that could be confused for Christian actions. The gospel cannot be reduced to mere actions.

The gospel is so much more than a simple feeding of a soul or building of a new home for the poor. The gospel means good news, but what is that good news? As John Piper says, "God is the gospel"¹¹. According to 2 Corinthians 4:4b-5a, "...the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." Paul finishes by saying that it is the "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". But the gospel requires understanding of the creation of the world by the Triune God and the fall of mankind into sin. Because of this sin, the people were separated from God and the punishment was death. The good news then is that God

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ John Piper, *God is the Gospel: meditations on God's love as the gift of himself* (Good News Publishers, 2005), 13.

chose to redeem a people out of this fallen world. He chose to do so in the second person of the Trinity. Jesus, being fully divine, came to the earth and took on the image of man, living a life perfect and worthy, fulfilling the law of God. At the right time, God gave Him over to death on the cross for the salvation of His people. His death was one of innocence and because he was both fully God and fully man, He and He alone could accomplish redemption for sinful mankind. It is only by His blood that His people can be saved and so it is only by trusting in Him that anyone can receive the gift of a new life that is everlasting with the Father. Not only did he die, but he fulfilled the Scriptures' by rising again in resurrection and ascending to the Father. In doing this, Christ overcame the curse of death for those who believe in Him, so that there was no longer spiritual death, but life found only in Christ. It does not seem possible to understand this kind of message with out words and only by deeds.

According to D.A Carson, the gospel has 8 key points¹². Tim Keller reviews Carson's points and summarizes them as such. First the gospel is *Christological*, meaning that Christ, who he is and what he did, is at the center of the gospel. Secondly, it is *theological*, in that salvation comes from God alone because of our sin. Third, it is *biblical*, in that the whole Bible focuses on the gospel message. Fourth, it is *apostolic*, meaning that the gospel message and all it contains was passed onto us by the apostles own eyewitness, which is authoritative. It is also *historical* because it is what happened in history and what we are called to do based on that history. It is not advice or good stories, but history itself. Sixth, it is *personal* because it must be believed on a personal level. The Seventh point is that the gospel is *universal*, for all people. Lastly, it is

¹² D. A. Carson, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:1–19)," a sermon preached on May 23, 2007 at The Gospel Coalition's conference in Deerfield, IL, available at <http://thegospelcoalition.org/resources/a/What-is-the-Gospel2>.

eschatological, meaning that it is more than just understanding current blessings, but rather looking forward to the future glory of the Lord in the final event: the consummation¹³. It is also eschatological in the important sense of the current realization of God's promised kingdom blessings even before the end.

Proclamation of the gospel is given primarily by means of speech, yet, as Carson points out, with reflection on 1 Corinthians 15:1-20, the gospel requires the complete transformation of a life and in that "attitudes, morals, relationships, and cultural interactions" are changed. After explaining this, Carson says that if our faith is genuine, it will never be faith alone, but faith lived out in action. "We might add that the gospel focuses on a message of what God has done and is doing, and must be cast in cognitive truths to be believed and obeyed, but this gospel never properly remains exclusively cognitive"¹⁴. In support of this Tim Keller's argument is that justification and justice cannot be separated. Once one has been justified it will lead to a life of justice¹⁵. This concept is echoed in 1 Peter 1:22-25, which says that since we have been justified, we are called to live lives of love. This does not mean that by simply showing love is the gospel, but rather, it is an action required by the transformed life.

Perhaps this topic has best been explained by Paul Madison, a writer for the Gospel Training Network:

If we simply preach the gospel and never act upon Jesus' commands to love and care for the poor and oppressed, we are not preaching the fullness of what the Gospel truly consists of. On the other hand, if we simply reach out to help others and never speak of Christ and His salvation, we are rendering the message impotent. And ultimately, we will harm those we so

¹³ Tim Keller, "The Gospel and the Poor," Journal vol 33, Is 3, *Themelios*, December 2008, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/publications/33-3/the-gospel-and-the-poor#a2>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Skye Jethani, "Tim Keller on Justification and Justice | Out of Ur | Conversations for Ministry Leaders," n.d., http://www.outofur.com/archives/2010/04/tim_keller_on_j.html.

desperately want to help by not sharing with them the incredibly glorious news that God loves them and desires a relationship with them.

The gospel is not words that Christ spoke or the words of His life, death and resurrection, but it is a life lived out in that context. God's words are never mere words. They are living, powerful and even active in our lives, when proclaimed by sinners. Only speaking truth but never proclaiming it in action is no better than the Pharisees who acted religious on the outside, but did not live what they preached. Instead, they were called hypocritical and Jesus said that they would not inherit the kingdom of heaven¹⁶. He said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you...have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness"¹⁷. It is not to say that the gospel is obedience of believer but, rather, that believers are affected by the gospels power in such a way that requires obedience and their lives should flow out of the good news of the gospel.

Understanding this, we can see the importance of the gospel in the ministry of Urban Missions, but how does the message that Christ came to save His people help the physical needs of men who are still sitting on the side of the street with no food? How does this help mother who is selling her body to buy her babies food? Though this gospel message can save the life everlasting if received by the person, we must see that the message of the gospel is further exemplified in Christ's own actions as well as, of course, the practice and teaching of the apostles. Christ did not say to the people, find your own food, for I already gave you spiritual food. Rather as he fed them spiritual food, and gave them food to fill their immediate physical need. The actions of Christ are often forgotten to the church that sees only the need for the gospel, while the words of Christ are often forgotten by the church that only meets the physical need. James 2:14-17 reminds us:

¹⁶ *ESV Study Bible Notes*, Matthew 23:13.

¹⁷ Matthew 23:23.

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Our deeds need to match our words in the very thing we have faith in. If we proclaim the gospel and live lives that are set apart from this world, we must do so in a manner worthy of the God we serve. Although this passage is specifically referring to the believing brother, it does not merit that the gospel message and the proactive life that should accompany it, should not be presented unto the non-believer. If we say we have faith in God, yet we do not live obedient lives, our faith may even need to be reexamined to see whether we really are in the faith or if it is dead¹⁸.

In part because of a failure to recognize the above points, we have often created a polarization between speaking the gospel and meeting physical needs. According to Samuel Escobar, “The curse of the protestant world mission in the past quarter century has been polarization”¹⁹ between evangelism on the one hand and caring for the people in our communities on the other. This polarization has been an endless battle in world missions. “In social and community development ministries in countries where the poverty level is high, the strain of this polarization—mission and social justice, evangelism and development—is a constant”. The modern mindset says that by evangelizing, we are meeting the spiritual needs of people. In order to meet the physical needs, development is then the answer²⁰. But in order to get beyond this dichotomy, we

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 13:5

¹⁹ Samuel Escobar and John Driver, *Christian mission and social justice* (Herald Press, 1978), 5.

²⁰ Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City & the People of God* (InterVarsity Press, 2010), 340-1.

must understand that “Justice is part of the gospel”²¹. We are making these issues separate when really they are two parts that make up a whole. How is the Christian church that ministers in the United States supposed to look when we have these two stark, contrasting ideas? Micah 6:8 tells us to “love mercy” and understanding the role of mercy is an important part of reaching out to a city in need.

Mercy on the City

To start understanding what we must do, we must change our minds and attitudes toward the lost and the poor, remembering that we are no better than them. The biblical idea of “mercy”, and its underlying idea of steadfast love (*Hesed*) helps us understand what we are called to do. “Mercy is a doorway to more: just and healed relationships, a society of peace, and a wholeness for both the recipients and the givers of mercy”. Despite the fact that it is a doorway, the concept of mercy alone can be a very treacherous thing. Compassion and mercy alone tend to have people make rash decisions that don’t constitute much thought but just heart led decisions. On the other hand, it is also a “powerful force within the human spirit, a stamp of the Divine nature”²². Though the Bible discusses mercy and tells us to show mercy, we must understand this concept and see how it can be displayed in a much larger way than we may tend to see.

The book of Hosea gives us a perfect example of mercy. As stated in Hosea 6:6, the LORD desires mercy rather than sacrifice. In this passage, mercy could also be translated as steadfast love, but the Greek translation of the Old Testament rendered it mercy. The word in Hebrew is *hesed*, or covenant faithful love. Micah 6:8 also uses

²¹ Clinton Stockwell, “The Church and Justice in Crisis”. Harvie M. Conn, *The Urban Face of Mission: Ministering the Gospel in a Diverse and Changing World* (P & R Publishing, 2002).

²² Robert Lupton, “When Mercy and Justice Collide,” *Journal of Urban Mission*, July 2009, <http://jofum.com/editorial/urban-voices/when-mercy-and-justice-collide/>.

hesed, but is translated in the ESV as “kindness”. Other passages in Hosea can also be translated in this same way, which helps us to understand the concept better. The correlation of mercy and steadfast love is urging the people once again to seek God and act with mercy with His help. The use of mercy in this sense as steadfast love is so beautiful. Many people can give mercy in compassion but this type of mercy is an expression of covenant faithful love. It is an overwhelming picture of mercy as it goes beyond a helping hand and into a love that never fails, in this sense. The last verse that speaks of mercy in Hosea is 14:3, which is a reminder of mercy given to the people of God and it is only in Him that ultimate mercy can be found. This is a response to God’s covenant faithful love towards us. They know only God can give them mercy from their whoredom, their worship of gods from their own hands. The book of Hosea is constantly displaying the act of mercy. Hosea shows mercy on his wife and takes her back in her whoredom, just as the LORD had mercy us, as adulterous people, and calls us his people. Hosea’s act shows that this mercy is to be demonstrated by us, because this was a picture of God’s *hesed* towards us. Since God loved us, we are able to love Him and in response, we should love our neighbor.

← As we progress through Scripture though, we see that not only is it God who gives mercy, but we too are called to give mercy as we have been given mercy (Matt 18:33). Luke 10:25-37 is a perfect example of the good Samaritan who helped the man in need, showing him mercy and compassion despite the many reasons the Samaritan had to not help the man, such as the possibility of uncleanness, getting caught by bandits and the cost of time and money. The Good Samaritan sacrificed a lot. The commandment Jesus gave in this passage was not to pick people out to be your neighbor, but who can you be a neighbor to? Jesus commands us to go and be a neighbor to anyone who needs it, poor, despised, marginalized in society. In this passage we are told to show mercy and compassion on our neighbors. In this same section, Jesus tells the people that we are to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves²³. In this love, Jesus shows us that compassion and mercy are necessary, just as the Samaritan showed. It is amazing to see this correlation in relation to Hosea when it portrayed mercy also as *hesed*. It seems then, that mercy would then be included in the second greatest commandment of loving your neighbor. We are given mercy so that we might glorify God in that mercy. 1 Timothy 1:16 tells us that we have received mercy so that in us, Jesus could display His love and patience. We are an example of Jesus Christ and what he has done in our lives that others might believe and continue the cycle of mercy.

Beyond mercy though, is the idea of biblical Shalom, which includes both justice and salvation, both wholeness and wellbeing, which seems to be the answer to the problem of mercy ministry without the gospel and visa versa. It can't stop at mercy because "mercy alone is insufficient". Both justice and mercy are equally highlighted in

²³ Luke 10:37.

the Bible²⁴. When we work only in “mercy ministry” we can easily get discouraged and get burned out because people are ungrateful and situations aren’t getting better. “Mercy that doesn’t move intentionally in the direction of development will end up doing more harm than good—to both giver and recipient”²⁵. Mercy as an act of kindness can be expanded upon. Mercy and *hesed* should walk hand in hand and take a step into a doorway to a much bigger concept: Biblical Shalom.

Biblical Shalom for our Cities

What is Shalom and how does it extend beyond mercy? How does it relate to the call of God’s people in the Bible? The Hebrew word Shalom is generally thought of as meaning “peace” or a greeting, but Shalom encompasses so much more than simply peace. It includes completeness, health, salvation, safety, welfare, prosperity and justice²⁶. “Poverty is the result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable. This speaks to the poverty that is such a factor in the problems of the city. Poverty is the absence of Shalom in all its meaning”²⁷. Relationships that are not functioning properly cause this lack of Shalom. This originates from our alienation from God and the problem goes all the way back to Adam and Eve and the fall of man. Shalom invests in the idea that there should be completeness of our created humanness in relation to God and our neighbor and this completeness can only be found in Christ. This completeness, which is found in Christ alone, is to be spread by Christ’s people who are now called to take on Christ’s mission

²⁴ Lupton, “When Mercy and Justice Collide.”

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Al Santino, “Bringing Shalom to the Community Table: Community Development as an Act of Ministry « Journal of Urban Mission,” Journal Vol 1, Is 1, *Journal of Urban Mission*, April 8, 2010, <http://jofum.com/editorial/articles/bringing-shalom-to-the-community-table/>.

²⁷ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 86, cited on page 62 of *When Helping Hurts*.

of seeking Shalom. This is not only for those in physical poverty, but of spiritual poverty. To understand our role of seeking Shalom we need to see the biblical teaching about this concept and that it is summed up in Christ and his work and is therefore foundational for our mission in the world.

Biblical Shalom

Shalom in the Old Testament often refers to a sense of peace from war. Other times it is used in the context of the types of offerings that were acceptable (ie. peace offerings). It is found to have about 250 occurrences throughout the Old Testament text²⁸. Often it is a name for or used to describe God. In Judges 6:24, the altar that Gideon built was named “The Lord is Shalom”. Isaiah 9:6 uses Shalom in the context of the child who is to be given unto the people and this child is Christ. He “shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”. Because the Messiah is the Prince of salvation and justice for the people, he brings ultimate peace or shalom. Christ encompasses Shalom and everything it means. It is He who creates wellbeing²⁹. Zechariah 9:9-10 speaks of the King who is to come to speak shalom to the people of the nations. He brings salvation and righteousness. Micah 5:5 says, “He shall be their peace”. He even makes a covenant of Shalom with his people that is everlasting, as described in Ezekiel 37:26. This is a covenant for the nations and their renewal. “The joining of these covenants also combines political life and the natural world, as if people and land are in symbolic unit”³⁰. This is also a political peace that is for the whole of the world. It is peace that brings out wellbeing and salvation among all peoples. Shalom encompasses a completeness that is both full and perfect, something only God can provide.

²⁸ Donald Gowan, “Shalom: A Study of the Biblical Concept of Peace” (Kerygma program, 2002), 10-1.

²⁹ Is. 45:7.

³⁰ ESV Study Bible Note: Ezek. 37:26.

Shalom is also found in the New Testament, which in Greek is *Eirene*. It is used nearly 90 times throughout the New Testament. It is important to still understand it as the same meaning as the in the Old Testament though it has an even richer meaning at times when describing the redemption of God through Christ for His people. Often this Shalom is interchangeable with the gospel or good news because of its connotation of peace that was brought between God and His people through Christ³¹.

Romans 1:7 starts off like many of Paul's letters, with a blessing or prayer for grace and shalom unto the people. This shalom is more than not fighting with other believers but rather, since they are of God, to live in harmony, which is of both a spiritual and physical nature³². Luke 2:14 says, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace among those with whom he is pleased". This peace is announced because of the coming of that child promised in Isaiah 9. The peace is because of the salvation, found only in Him. John 14:27 states that Jesus leaves us with His peace, and gives us His peace. It is more than just peace in this context, but the also a "notion of positive blessing, especially in terms of a right relationship with God"³³. Acts 10:36 shows us the correlation of the good news of the gospel as a Shalom found only in Christ. Luke expands on this in verse 38 by saying this good news of Shalom is the power of the Holy Spirit in Christ to do good and to heal to those who were oppressed by Satan. After Christ's death and resurrection, He told his disciples that they were in turn to bear witness that He was judge over all and forgiveness was only in Him. It was at this point that God's people were given the Holy Sprit so that they could testify to His name and continue Christ's ministry of Shalom.

³¹ Gowan, "Shalom: A Study of the Biblical Concept of Peace," 11-2.

³² *ESV Study Bible*, Note: Romans 1:7.

³³ *Ibid.*, Note: John 14:27.

Beyond Mercy Ministry

This understanding of Shalom can help us see why seeking shalom extends beyond mercy ministries and must include *hesed*. We can give mercy to help others, but shalom is also called for. Mercy is helpful and we are called to show it, but mercy ministries that do not involve *hesed* and do not include shalom do not answer society's problems of injustice, brokenness and lack of well-being. It does not give us salvation or prosperity. It is the "doorway" to this concept, but so much more is to be done. Shalom takes from the concept of mercy and expands on it. Mercy is being compassionate and showing *hesed* to God's people while shalom uses mercy as its guide and takes it a step further by bringing about a peace for the people, which can only be found in Christ. By showing *hesed* in mercy, we can then bring about Shalom by loving others enough (showing *hesed*) to share the shalom of God, giving them salvation and wholeness of being. The church is the example of hope that we have in Christ and that should be shared with people; they should be their support³⁴. The power of redemption and obedience as well as the call to shalom should be effective on a personal and community level. Not only will the life be transformed physically but also it will be transformed spiritually³⁵. When we understand the correct view of mercy, we can see that mercy, and the *hesed* that it encompasses is enough and when combined with shalom, it can transform our communities. Understanding the implications of the transformed life should cause us to seek shalom.

The Case for Seeking Shalom

Sometimes with ministry, especially in the United States, it seems to be much

³⁴ Mark R. Gornik, *To live in peace: biblical faith and the changing inner city* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 12-3.

³⁵ Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, 342.

easier if we could just give a hand out and be done. Not having to share the gospel with someone who has probably heard it before and may get angry at us, not having to deal with social issues that are too big for us to handle and no more guilt for the needy because we did our part. “It may be easier and more comfortable to simply not mention the Gospel, but then we fail in our commission as Christians to truly love and serve the whole person – body and spirit”³⁶. Seeking Shalom—justice, salvation, wellbeing and wholeness—for the city is a must. But how and why are ministries effective if they do so? Ministries that can break down stereotypes, seek justice and wholeness for the people, make a commitment to serve, and seek both wisdom and salvation create make for an effective ministry. These aspects will be explored further below. The city is a cruel place and it’s hard to find Shalom in that type of atmosphere, but Shalom should still be sought while we remain on this earth.

While seeking Shalom, the first thing that needs to be done while working in urban ministry is that stereotypes need to be broken down. Although there is no set standard as to how one should go about a ministry, it is helpful to first break down stereotypes so that one can more effectively minister to others without a preconceived prejudice against the one they are trying to help. It is all too easy for a homeless person to be seen as lazy or a prostitute as a money or sex crazed person. Yet, without talking to them, we know nothing about their lives. Many homeless people are on the streets for addictions, loss of work, mental illnesses and yes, the occasional laziness. It is not fair to classify all to have the same issues and each one should be dealt with accordingly. On that same note, many prostitutes are not merely on the streets because that is their desire. Rather, some feel

³⁶ Paul Madson, “Global Training Network » Balancing the Gospel and Social Justice,” n.d., <http://www.globaltrainingnetwork.org/2010/04/social-justice-the-gospel-and-glenn-beck/>.

forced to do so, so that they can provide for their children as a single mother and many others are trafficked in, against their will. Where is the sense of wholeness, justice or salvation for the people caught in these situations? Often times, these are the people that we either ignore or condemn, yet they obviously need to see God's shalom and we can do so by seeking justice for them.

Shalom is often connected with justice. Throughout the Bible we see themes of oppression. God's people were constantly being oppressed in the Old Testament. The majority of the people that we see being oppressed were the poor, blind, and the outcast. Isaiah 1:16 pleads for the people to clean themselves and remove themselves from evil. In these verses, it is calling out the hypocrites among the people who would sacrifice and yet not let their hearts be humbled to reach out to others. After the call to repentance, Isaiah 17 says that they are to "seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause". This is a call for the people to, in their pious worship of their God, seek those who are in need. We are to do justice and correct oppression by reaching out to the orphans and widows who are in need, but it is not limited to only those two people groups. Rather, it appears as though they are the ones who are in need for they do not have anyone caring for or defending them. Should we not apply this to the homeless, the widowed, the woman who has been forced into sexual trade labor, as to all other people who are being oppressed? This is echoed in James 1:27 by saying that "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world". Those who have no defenders, like the orphaned and the widows, need help and we as Christians are to plead their cause and seek justice against their oppressors. Just as Christ

came to pronounce justice to the Gentiles, we are to carry out his same mission by proclaiming justice of Christ: his judgment, therefore the people's need to repent, and salvation that can be found only in Him³⁷.

Though there is no easy manual to follow in how we can fight justice in certain circumstances, we must understand that seeking justice differs by situation and case. We may need to step in and seek justice for the woman who is being oppressed by her landlord, but it could be a much bigger problem in which seeking justice for only one person is simply not as adequate. Justice should be sought not only for the girl who is found as a part of a sex trade ring, but also for all the women caught in this depraved trade. It should not stop with just one person but should be sought for all who are oppressed in a situation.

Shalom is wholeness of both body and spirit. While Jesus is healing the sick and feeding the poor, he is doing much more than physical work. He is exposing the people of their real need. The blind need not only vision but also spiritual sight. The poor need not physical food alone, but they need THE bread of life. The dying need not merely a physical healing but they need spiritual life³⁸. This is the holistic sense in which Jesus taught. Similarly, James 2:15-6 says, "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?" Thus we are clearly directed to help care for the physical needs of others. It is an approach to Shalom that includes the wholeness of the body and the soul. In order to do this, we must gain a heart of wisdom. So, what does wisdom have to do with Shalom? James 3 tells us that we are

³⁷ Bibles, *ESV Study Bible*, Matt 12:18; Note Matt 12:18-20.

³⁸ Apolos Landa Tucto, "Lausanne World Pulse - Themed Articles - Shalom & Eirene: The Full Framework for Health Care," n.d., <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles.php/1089?pg=all>.

to seek wisdom from above. When listing what that meant, James says that, since we have the wisdom of Christ, we should seek Shalom and that those who are the shalom-makers will sow, in shalom, a harvest of righteousness.

Throughout the Bible we are told to gain wisdom, wisdom that is not like the world thinks of wisdom, but wisdom that is from above. Proverbs 1:7 tells us that fools despise wisdom. Wisdom from God is unlike most things we would say are wisdom by the world's standards. To further this, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1 says that the wisdom, which is the gospel, is but mere folly to those who are not God's elect. This is so we might not rest in man's the wisdom, but rather of God³⁹. Since seeking shalom produces a harvest of righteousness, we can see that this is meant to "believers" as a warning to make sure that they were in the faith and an encouragement to those who are in the faith that their fruit will abide and they too will stay in the vine.

Like John says, if we are in Christ, we will produce fruit, which means other believers, and not only will we abide in Christ, but those believers will also abide in Christ. In producing this abiding fruit, we must consider the task. Judas and Silas went out to the Gentile believers and read Paul's letter to them so that they could be encouraged⁴⁰. They were sent to encourage the believers and to follow through with them. This looks different in all different types of urban ministries, but whatever the case, training people in discipleship is important. Some sort of follow up is vital in urban ministry if we want to create fruit that abides.

Seeking shalom is also a commitment to time and effort in other's lives. We are, as in the Great Commission, called to make disciples and by taking the time to seek

³⁹ 1 Cor 2:5.

⁴⁰ Acts 15:22

shalom for the city, we can make disciples and follow that call that was set before us. So, as we see in James, in order to produce this harvest of righteousness, we are called to live in shalom⁴¹. By seeking Shalom, we will lead others into this righteous harvest. Despite our seeking of Shalom, we must remember that it is the work of God in the lives of the elect and we are but a mere instrument while seeking shalom. It is only because of Christ's work of wisdom and shalom that we can seek shalom.

Shalom is seeking salvation for the people. Food cannot save the dying soul from the wrath of God, so the food of the Word, who is bread and who is water needs to be given as well. By seeking justice, wellbeing for the people and the wisdom of Christ, we may produce a harvest through the power of the Holy Spirit, because of Christ's works, through the Father. It is a Trinitarian effort in the work of salvation. Jude tells us that we are to wait for the mercy of the LORD which brings us salvation, and to have mercy on those who are not Christians because we have been saved, by the help of Christ and should save them from the snatch of Satan and judgment (Jude 21-23). We are told to show mercy to all people, being careful not to fall yet still hate the wickedness of the world. Mercy is shown to us that we might have salvation found only in Christ and so that we may honor and glorify God. We were told at the Great Commission that we were to continue the mission of Christ and his mission was salvation. It was a wholeness of life unto his people. This wholeness of life was not only for the life everlasting, but it is to be felt now because of what we have in Christ, so we are to seek a wholeness for all people, now.

1 Peter 3:11 reminds us to "seek peace and pursue it". Because of what we have been saved from, namely the wrath of God, we should strive to live lives that are worthy

⁴¹ James 3:18.

of the gospel of Christ and thus, seek peace for others. Though we are not perfect and ministries will never be perfect, in Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we can walk by the Spirit, hoping for the things God hopes for. As we seek shalom, we are continuing the ministry of Christ, who in his death and resurrection humbled himself for the sake of mankind so that we might have salvation. We must wholly take part in this for we were dead and have been raised with Christ, so we too should humble ourselves to seek the salvation for others. The result of seeking shalom is an effective ministry that is Christ-centered.

Seeking Shalom for Others: The Blessing and Sanctification

Peace is to be pursued by those who are of God, as shown in the plea of 2 Timothy 2:22. It calls God's people to flee from things of their youth and pursue Shalom. We are called to do this as believers, along with other believers. Imagine the impact if we all sought Shalom for the city; if we sought for the wellbeing and the salvation of the city; if we were seeking for the city what Christ sought for His people: A peace found in Him alone. There is a blessing for those who seek shalom. Matthew 5:9 says that the shalom-makers will be blessed. "Those who promote God's messianic peace (shalom) will receive the ultimate reward of being called sons of God as they reflect the character of their heavenly Father"⁴². Proverbs 11:18 also says that there is a reward for the one who sows righteousness, as the peacemakers do, as opposed to the wicked who receive nothing. In Isaiah 56:1-2 the Lord commands his people to "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed". The one whose hope and faith is always in the LORD and "who executes justice for the

⁴² Ibid., Note Matt 5:9.

oppressed, who gives food to the hungry” will also be blessed⁴³.

We are told in Hebrews that we are to strive for shalom with all people and more than that, strive after holiness. Striving for shalom and holiness is a part of sanctification. This kind of shalom ministry is not optional, but rather is required as a part of our sanctification. Though it is hard and not always a desire of our hearts, we are commanded to do this so that we might be sanctified and endure in the perseverance of the saints. The context of Hebrews 12 is finishing a race worthy of Christ. This race is surrounded by the witness of those who have gone before us and looking to the finish line where we see our only hope to endure, Christ. Being a Christian is not easy because it requires us to follow the example of Christ’s suffering, but it is one in which we have hope. Seeing what is good and what is right is never easy, but the reward in the end is great. What He did on that cross, we can never repay. But in our lives, we should seek to honor the one who gave His sinless life for our sinful ones.

Conclusion: The Call for All Christians

Are we as Christians to serve the poor and needy? Are we to be involved in social justice issues? Are we to seek a wholeness for our cities? In this study we have sought to demonstrate the great need and the great obligation for all of us. We have also contended that “our involvement in social justice must never be divorced from the message of Jesus Christ and the salvation that He came to bring. Sin is the root issue. Jesus is the cure for sin!”⁴⁴ Christians are called to take part in where they are by seeking shalom for their city. They are there to be a minister to the city in grace, truth and reconciliation, through shalom. We are to present a healing found only in Christ. Seeking

⁴³ Psalm 145:5-7.

⁴⁴ Madson, “Global Training Network » Balancing the Gospel and Social Justice.”

shalom does not mean we give an extra \$20 to world vision next year or work once a year in a soup kitchen. Rather it means committing everything you are to seeking shalom. As Tim Keller puts it, “The gospel requires us to be involved in the life of the poor—not only financially, but personally and emotionally. Our giving must not be token but so radical that it brings a measure of suffering into our own lives”⁴⁵. Giving of ourselves in seeking a wholeness of shalom for the world is truly showing the love of Christ and submitting to His love as we are called to do.

The gospel cannot be separated from shalom. The gospel encompasses the work of shalom. Christ brought salvation and in Him wholeness is found. Since we have been justified, we must follow in the act of sanctification. Once cleansed, by this a once and for all atoning, we are to have continual cleansing that is also an application of the work of Christ, the ground of both our justification and our sanctification. Though they are completely distinct, they cannot be separated. We follow in Christ’s steps to show love to one another and are to do just as he has done for us. We have been given mercy and we should therefore give mercy. We have shalom in Christ and therefore should seek shalom for others.

Though many have looked at the current situation of the world with no hope because it seems impossible for one person to change the world, we must stop looking at solving the problem completely. No problem will ever be completely solved while sin exists. If we as the body understood the implications of Shalom and our call to seek it, we wouldn’t need to do alone, but work together in unity for one purpose as Christ commands us to in Philippians 2. Since believers have been encouraged by the love of Christ and the participation of the Spirit, we should have the same mind of Christ to be in

⁴⁵ Keller, “The Gospel and the Poor.”

unity with one another. As the body, we should look to others needs before our own, just as Christ, in humility, humbled himself to death on the cross, though he is God. He became a servant to all and so should we. In His obedience, He was glorified and in our obedience, we share in Christ's reign.

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