Why God’s Justice matters

Tim Stafford, General Editor & Senior Writer

For the last three years I have overseen the editorial direction of a new study Bible, God’s Justice, with introductions to every book of the Bible and in-text notes. The commentary aims to show that every book in the Bible contributes to one great story—the story of God setting the world right. He loves the world, and he has every intention of redeeming every part of it. That is the very definition of God’s justice. I believe this publication is a really significant event, and I’d like to explain why.

First, because it brings together God’s people from the whole world in a crucial joint project. God’s Justice unites 55 writers from five continents. To understand fully God’s plan for his creation, we need the insights of the whole church, in a mosaic of cultures. This is, I believe, the first time writers from the whole world have joined in such a foundational project. It is, in a sense, a fulfillment of prophecy, for the Bible often predicts that people will come from east and west, north and south to jointly serve the living God. God’s Justice represents one practical demonstration that this is coming true.

Second, because it bridges a gap between young and old. We often find that younger Christians care deeply for issues of social and environmental justice, whereas older Christians focus on evangelism. God’s Justice brings together these perspectives: both social justice and spiritual redemption are integral and necessary parts of God setting the world right.

It is all one story. For the world to become as God intends, the poor and suffering must be made whole. The natural creation must be cleansed and beautified. Evil must be eliminated everywhere under God’s eye, and sin must be forgiven. There can be no justice, in any ultimate sense, unless the Good News of God’s redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus is heard, understood and embraced. The theme of justice, seen from God’s perspective, embraces the whole world, including the human soul. This understanding brings together Christians who have been divided.

Third, because it enables the church to escape the traps of celebrity worship, therapeutic individualism, and prosperity teaching. These are strangling our vitality and taking us away from Jesus. It is not enough to criticize these tendencies. We need something stronger and more attractive to overcome them. Only the powerful, idealistic and unifying theme of God’s justice enables us to escape our own narcissism.

God’s Justice re-introduces us to God’s passion for the lost. It helps us to see that we are part of a big story, which God is writing. The God who gave his very life in serving others, will invite us to join him in the justice cause, if we are willing to listen to his Word.

Fourth, because it grounds activism in Scripture—and thus in the worship of the living God. People who feel passionately about social and political issues--child trafficking, abortion, slavery, poverty, gender discrimination, racial prejudice, environmental degradation, the list goes on—are impatient to see change. Their clear vision of right and wrong energizes them, and can push them into taking action. But as time goes on, they also encounter the complications of a world where even the “good people” are sinners, where progress is difficult, where discouragement reigns. To sustain them, they need a deep, Scriptural understanding of what God has called them to do and how it fits into the larger story of what God is doing. God’s Justice can help them see that they are part of a very ancient tradition of justice, one dating to the prophets. It can show them that they are not alone, and encourage them that God is determined to set the world right. It can help them not to reduce the whole redemption project to their particular calling. It can keep them strong but not fanatical. We badly need activists, but we need activists who possess a deep and wide grounding in the Bible story. God’s Justice gives it to them.

Fifth, because it enables traditional evangelicals to see the wideness of the gospel. Evangelicalism is a powerful force in the world largely because it has emphasized personal conversion to Christ, forgiveness of sins and redemption through Christ’s death on the cross. Unquestionably this is at the heart of the gospel, which speaks eloquently to human hearts. The danger, always, is the possibility of reducing the gospel to a strictly spiritual transaction, which makes no earthly difference.
It has never been God’s intention to simply save souls, and let the world he made and loves fall to pieces. He wants to redeem everything, and he calls his image-bearers to be forgiven and transformed in order that they might play a crucial role in redeeming everything he loves. God’s Justice restores the vital connection of spiritual transformation to the world.

I could go on, but I hope these five points give you a sense of why I believe God’s Justice to be the most important publication you will see this year—and perhaps this decade.

Tim Stafford
General Editor & Senior Writer

God’s Justice