

BREAKING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN MISPLACED PEOPLES AND A SELF-RIGHTEOUS  
MENTALITY: LEARNING TO HAVE A KINGDOM PERSPECTIVE REGARDING DISPARITY  
AND SOCIAL INJUSTICES

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This paper will provide a brief theology describing the God-imposed biblical obligation that Christians have to reach out in holistic development towards displaced persons both in their home and abroad. I will begin by sharing some statistics about the issue of displaced persons. I will outline some of the biblical mandates in both the Old and New Testament that speak about the affluence of God's provision in His creation as well as His intentions for His creation; my research suggests that, together, these mandates both encourage and instigate that Christians ought to be involved in social responsibility. I will depict how our failure to uphold biblical stewardship over the earth and its resources has not only impacted the displaced persons issue but also extenuated it. I will depict some of the contributing factors related to the displaced persons issue, including systemic corruptions instilled in our political and economic systems, our churches, and even in Christian eschatology related to social responsibility. I will depict some of the cultural dilemmas that play a role in shaping Christians' mindsets about helping displaced persons and how these biases can often prevent Christians from being moved to compassion for displaced persons.

"Today there are more than 200 million people migrating around the world, or one out of every thirty-five people on the planet." (Groody, 2005) Some of these people are victims of human trafficking, some of them are displaced due to natural disasters, some are displaced within their own countries due to war or other internal conflict, some of them are refugees, and still others are undocumented. Some have proper documentation, yet are stuck in the system waiting for asylum in a country not of their own origin, in hopes that they might be able to start a new life. (Connor, 2010) The average age of immigrants who died crossing the U.S. Mexico border was 31, and 46% of deaths were from exposure to elements including hyperthermia, hypothermia and dehydration. One third of these individuals were never identified, and their families will never be able to find out what became of them. (Ewing, 2013) It is not without good reason that people take the bold and courageous step towards migration.

"'We are migrating not because we want to but because we have to,' said Mario. 'My family at home depends on me. I'm already dead in Mexico, and getting to the U.S. gives us the hope of living, even though I may die.'" (Groody, 2005) Many immigrants are labeled as lazy, outsiders, or even as

unworthy of residing in the host country. We often make these assumptions without understanding how dire the circumstances that these individuals face really are. Because of the mindset that is held towards immigrants, they are often treated poorly in the host country that receives them and may even end up as worse off than they were in their country of origin. "Even many of the animals here live better than we do here," said one refugee, part of a group from India that was seeking work in the European Union. "It is as if we are worth nothing to the people who live here, and if we die, it won't matter." (Groody, 2005) "The insults they endure are not just a direct assault on their pride but on their very existence. Their vulnerability and sense of meaninglessness weigh heavily on them; they often feel that the most difficult part of being an immigrant is to be no one to anyone." (Groody, 2005)

The 21st century has been referred to by some scholars as "the age of migration" (Groody, 2009; 2015) And although some individuals see this as alarming, as Christians we must believe that God in His sovereignty has a purposeful and redemptive plan which He is working in the midst of these changes. In alignment with this thought, not only is this global phenomenon giving many Muslims the first chance to hear the gospel, but it is also bringing many Muslims into an environment that is not religiously hostile against Christianity. In fact, one German pastor said that he saw a staggering 1,200 Muslims converted in just three years. (Visser, 2016) As a response to both the positive and negative aspects of this global phenomenon, we have seen Christian leaders bind together in unity, expressing, "Moments like these are when Christians cannot remain silent and still. In light of this crisis, we commit ourselves and our churches to actively care for and minister to global refugees with mercy and compassion, both here and abroad, based on God's compelling concern for all people in need and especially refugees." (Stetzer, 2016)

Now that we have a basic understanding of the concept of displaced persons, we will transition into an explanation of some biblical mandates which can instruct our response and interactions with the marginalized and displaced. Because the issue of displaced persons is such a massively diverse problem which includes the poor and rich, educated and uneducated, racial minorities and ethnic majorities, victims and oppressors, I would like to specify more precisely what I have in mind when I am using the

term "displaced persons." UNESCO has an article on displaced persons which describes them as such: "Forced to leave the home region to which they are attached and for which they have the knowledge to make a living most effectively, displaced populations often become impoverished." (UNESCO, 2016) Therefore, when I write about our obligations towards displaced persons, it also entails the idea of poverty. Meaning we have an obligation to help the impoverished and those from whom the right and ability to adequately provide for themselves and their dependents has been removed.

In Genesis Chapter 1, after God tells Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, God also establishes a system of governance in which He mandates that Adam and Eve are responsible to Him for their relationship with the earth and the living creatures that are on it. Genesis 1 outlines that man is responsible primarily to God as Creator, to the earth which we are to develop, and to our fellow human beings with whom we are to share its riches. Dr. Donald Hay says, "There is great abundance in creation, more than enough to provide adequately for the needs of all. This does not mean however, that mankind may exploit the created order to satisfy his never-ending greed." (Nichols, 1980) By unfaithful stewardship, in which we fail to conserve the earth's finite resources, to develop them fully, or distribute them justly, we are both perpetuating and extenuating the systemic injustices that contribute to the displaced persons issue. For example, unfaithful stewardship of our planet's resources leads to some nations that are encumbered with excess goods and material items while some do not have enough to sustain their populations. Often the abundance or excess of industrialised nations "depends on international economic structures that are unjust." (Nichols, 1980) If we fail to distribute these resources justly, then we are also failing to uphold our responsibility to our fellow man. How can we expect people to remain in a country that does not yield an economic production that enables them to live or thrive?

When God called Abraham, He told him "leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family. (Genesis 12:1) Leave your idols and your God's. (Joshua 24:2) I will cause you to become a great nation. (Genesis 12:2) I will multiply your descendants beyond numbers like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore." (Genesis 22:17) Here, God is not only calling Abraham to leave his home, to migrate to a new and far away land (which we will discuss in more detail later on), but God is once

again reinstating His intentions for mankind by passing on to Abraham the same intentions He had given Adam, Eve, and Noah. "Be fruitful and multiply;" God would not repetitively suggest that we multiply if there were not sufficient resources to sustain us (Genesis 1-2; Exodus 16-17; Deuteronomy 8:7-9) and He would not suggest that we be fruitful if He had only niggardly provided the resources for just a small handful of us to do so. (Genesis 3:21; Genesis 9:3; Job 38:41) When God commanded mankind to be fruitful and multiply, He surely knew the ramifications of that which would result from our multiplication, both the increase of population and the effects it would have on the earth, and He provided all that we need in order to adequately do so. (Psalm 34:10; Matthew 6:31-32; Philippians 4:19) His goal in having us multiply was not so that we would starve and suffer, but that we might learn shalom, the type of selfless unity and harmony that considers all of man as bearing the image of God and treats them accordingly.

For Abraham, the choice to be fruitful also entailed moving away from his native country. Is this not the hope that many immigrants hold when they are believing that somewhere, in another land, there is a hope for a new life, a more abundant life? Abraham, the father of the Jews, Muslims, and Christians, was an immigrant. (Genesis 12:1) Lot, Abraham's nephew, was internally displaced; though he fled from Sodom, he was forced to find refuge in Zoar and later in a cave in the mountains. (Genesis 19:14-30) Isaac's wife Rebekah had to migrate from Aram-naharaim all the way to the land of Canaan where she then lived out the rest of her life with Isaac (Genesis 24:1-52). Jacob, who eventually became known as Israel and was the father of the 12 tribes, was an immigrant who came from Canaan into Paddan-aram and lived there for over twenty years in order that he might pay the dowry for his brides. (Genesis 28:1-21; 29:1-3; 31: 34) Joseph was a refugee who sought asylum in Egypt. (Genesis 37; 39-40) The Israelites were immigrants and refugees fleeing from Egypt to a land of which they knew not whether they would be received at all. (Exodus 16-17) The list goes on and on, but I will just add one more figure to it, Jesus of Nazareth, Who was forced to flee from His home in Galilee when King Herod sought to kill Him through use of political structures.

With all of the displaced figures in Israel's history, it is a wonder that Jesus' ministry did not address the issue of displaced persons directly, or maybe it did? The Hebrew word *miqlat* (Strong's, 4733) actually means refuge or asylum. Its counterpart is the word *machaseh* (Strong's, 4268) which means refuge or shelter. In the Hebrew language these two words are the closest thing to refugee that I was able to find. The most beautiful part about these two words is that over and over again God says, I am your refuge, I am your asylum. (Job 24:8; Psalm 14:6; Psalm 46:1; Psalm 61:3; Psalm 62:7-8) Not only does God indicate that He is our refuge, but biblically God would personally provide places of refuge for the Israelites in which to find asylum and rest during their times of need. (Numbers 35:6-23; Joshua 20:2-3; Joshua 21:21-38; 1 Chronicle 6:57-67) With God as our place of refuge, the One who not only brings refuge, but also designates physical cities as places where His people might go to in order to find refuge, how is it that we could claim to be Christians, (to actually carry the identity of God in Christ) if we are not also willing to follow and imitate Him in His quest of bringing refuge to those in need? If we are His hands and feet, chosen to distribute His justice and Kingdom here on earth, how could we not strive to be a refuge to those in need, thus directing them towards the eternal refuge of the God who loves and has provided for them?

It seems that in our modern understanding of refugees we have failed to retain the Hebrew of understanding of *miqlat* and *mechaseh*, rather we seem only to have retained the pharisaic perspective of the "goy" (outsiders, Gentiles, foreigners, other nations) versus "Yisrael" (chosen nation, insiders, the striving) Our mentality of refugees and other displaced persons is just like that of the Pharisees towards the Gentiles, towards the unclean, the unholy, and the unchosen. This "us" versus "them" mentality is the exact mindset that Jesus came to abolish. (Galatians 2:17-21; Romans 3:30; Romans 10:12; 1 Corinthians 1:24; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-14) Although we do not find Jesus talking in the Bible directly about refugees, we do find both Jesus and Paul commanding us to love the "goy". When we label others as refugees, trafficked persons, or immigrants, we are creating a divided mentality in which it is us versus them. Jesus' ministry of reconciliation deals largely with overcoming these types of human-constructed divisions. The Israelites became caught up in the mentality that they were God's

chosen people; this caused them not only to become very ethnocentric but also to emphasize differences between themselves and others, thus dividing the outsiders from the insiders. In Galatians 3:28, Paul tells us, "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus."

If we read further into Paul's statement in Galatians, we see that it is prefixed with a story in which he accuses Peter of hypocrisy. This example is actually one of the Bible's most descriptive definitions of what hypocrisy is. Here we see Paul rebuking Peter because he ate with the Gentiles when no one was looking, but once others from Jerusalem arrived, he refused to eat with the Gentiles, because he was scared of what the others might think of him. In doing this, he was denying the fact that the Gentiles were already accepted by Christ, as they are (Galatians 3:14), and was condemning them under the law. (Galatians 3:10-12) He was reinstating the divide that Christ had died to get rid of. (Galatians 3:13) Namely, there is no longer insider or outsider, chosen or unchosen, Jew or Gentile. . . For you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

In Matthew 23:13, Jesus says "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces. But you won't go in yourselves, and you don't let others enter either." In context, Jesus is talking about the law and the misunderstanding that the Pharisees have regarding the law: "You crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden." (Verse 3) "You are careful to tithe. . . but you ignore the more important aspects of the law -- justice, mercy, and faith." (Verse 23) "The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Verse 11-12) After reading such a profound statement as this, we must analyze our own thoughts and actions. Have we exalted ourselves above others? Have we denied others justice, mercy, and faith just because they are refugees, migrants, and foreigners whom we do not perceive as welcome in our land or deserving of our assistance? Are we shutting the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces? Have we categorized ourselves as worthy of God's justice and provision, believing that we deserve these provisions and that others do not? Has God not provided bountiful resources for all of mankind to

multiply and be fruitful? Are we not chosen to be the hands and feet of God in distributing His love, justice, provisions, and mercy for the people of this earth?

Jesus' ministry was not just about talking, but doing. He challenged the tendency of human beings to idolize the state, or idolize religion, or a particular theology; rather, He challenged us as individuals and especially as His followers to act in response to those whom he puts on our path. In Matthew 9:35 "Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And He healed every kind of disease and illness." When John the Baptist sent his disciples to see if Jesus was the coming Messiah, Jesus replied by saying "Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard—the blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor." The signs of the Kingdom were these acts of justice, mercy, and forgiveness. These acts were so central to Christ's message that in His parable in Matthew 25, the Messiah is seen in the last days sorting out those who will inherit the Kingdom of God from those who will not by organizing between those who followed Christ in serving the needs of the misfortunate, the poor, and the oppressed, from those who did not.

Here the paper transitions from looking at biblical mandates on how the church should treat the marginalized and displaced into some of the factors that may be contributing to the displaced persons issue. "Poverty is not a necessary evil but often the result of social, economic, political, and religious systems marked by injustice, exploitation, and oppression. . . Evil is not only in the heart but also in social structures. Because God is just and merciful, hating evil and loving righteousness, there is an urgent need for Christians in the present circumstances to commit ourselves to acting in mercy and seeking justice." (Wheaton, 1983) This profession raises awareness to the fact that the evils we have grown numb and accustomed to (such as poverty and displaced persons) are not necessary evils, but they are here as a result of the flaws in the systems to which we have both created and adhere to.

As individuals living within corrupt systems, our every action contains within it the choice to either support these corruptions or to oppose them. Each purchase in a grocery store is a vote; it can either be a vote to support the corruptions in the system (purchasing cheap products made from exploited labor

and victims of human trafficking) or a vote to oppose those systems (purchasing fair-trade items and other morally and ethically made products). While we may not be able to change the corruptions in the systems at large, we can choose whether we will support these systems or not. Jesus "exposed the injustices in society and condemned the self-righteousness of its leaders" (Matthew 23:25) "His was prophetic compassion, and it resulted in the formation of a community which accepted the values of the Kingdom of God and stood in contrast to the Roman and Jewish establishment." (Wheaton, 1983) As Jesus challenged the Roman and Jewish establishment from which He came, we must also carefully analyze the political, governmental, cultural, and religious establishments from which we come. Remembering that Christ's compassion is what led Him to oppose such injustices, and eventually it led Him to death, we should not passively oppose these systems, but radically, so that we are moved to suffer with those who are being trodden on and abused by structural and systemic injustices.

"Men and women have an intrinsic dignity and worth, because they were created in God's likeness to know, love, and serve Him. But now, through sin, every part of their humanness has been distorted. Human beings have become self-centered, self-serving rebels who do not love God or their neighbor as they should. In consequence, they are alienated both from their Creator and from the rest of His creation, which is the basic cause of the pain, disorientation, and loneliness which so many people suffer today. Sin also frequently erupts in anti-social behavior, in violent exploitation of others, and in a depletion of the earth's resources of which God has made men and women His stewards. Humanity is guilty, without excuse and on the broad road which leads to destruction." (Manila Manifesto, 1989) If we do not see the refugees, traffic victims, economic migrants, internally displaced people, those fleeing religious violence and persecution, famine sufferers, and victims of rural poverty as intrinsically valuable and deserving of God's distributive justice and love (Mott, 1982), then we will further alienate these people both from God's love and from the resources that they need in order to sustain their existence. Christians living in diaspora communities in urban cities are surrounded by these types of people groups; this paper encourages these Christians to "bear counter-cultural witness of the love of Christ in deed and word, by obeying the extensive biblical commands to love the stranger, defend the cause of the foreigner,

visit the prisoner, practise hospitality, build friendships, invite others into our homes, and provide help and services." (Cape Town Commitment, 2011)

"When there is no distinction in conduct between Christians and non-Christians -- for example in the practice of corruption and greed, or sexual promiscuity, or rate of divorce, or relapse to pre-Christian religious practice, or attitudes towards people of other races, or consumerist lifestyles, or social prejudice -- then the world is right to wonder if our Christianity makes any difference at all. Our message carries no authenticity to a watching world. A divided Church has no message for a divided world. Our failure to live in reconciled unity is a major obstacle to authenticity and effectiveness in mission." (Cape Town Commitment, 2011) Our primary task as Christians is to live like Christ, to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to promote God's Kingdom here on earth. If we are succumbing to the evils of this world and failing to live with a different mindset, a different heart, and different actions from the community at large, then we are among those Christians whose message carries no authenticity to a watching world.

"We must attack the materialism of our culture and the maldistribution of the nation's wealth and services. We recognize that as a nation we play a crucial role in the imbalance and injustice of international trade and development. Before God and a billion hungry neighbors, we must rethink our values regarding our present standard of living and promote a more just acquisition and distribution of the world's resources." (Lausanne, 1974) "We denounce environmental destruction, wastefulness and hoarding. We deplore the misery of the poor who suffer as a result of these evils. We also disagree with the drabness of the ascetic. For all these deny the Creator's goodness and reflect the tragedy of the fall." (Nichols, 1980) We are vice-regents with God and have been granted the earth along with its resources. So long as we continue to manipulate these resources towards the advantage of the few, then we are failing to live out God's love, justice, and mercy. Our materialism comes at the cost of others' well-being; we have been placed in a life circumstance that allows us to make a decision, either to use our excess to support the marginalized and displaced, or to wallow in our surplus.

In summary, the Bible indicates no uncertainty about the earth's ability to provide adequately for the human race. There is no hint that the provision is scarce or may run out, rather the focus is on the

abundance of God's creation. Many biblical figures and heroes were displaced persons; God was not only a refuge to those people, but through Jesus' ministry, God depicted that we are also supposed to take on a role of support, healing, and reconciliation towards the marginalized and displaced. When we are addressing systemic corruptions, we must begin by progressively and intentionally choosing to oppose the evils instilled in our systems one small step at a time. Christians living in diaspora communities in urban cities have full time access to the displaced and marginalized; they should pay heed to their bountiful opportunity to practice hospitality, build friendships, invite others into their homes, provide help and other services, therefore obeying the biblical commands to defend the cause of the foreigner. Finally, if there is no distinction in conduct between Christians and non-Christians, we will not have a powerful witness. The materialism and consumerism of some are not only preventing justice and equality on a massive and global scale, but are also influencing our wastefulness and our effectiveness as good stewards of what God has given us.

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