

## **Ἐν ἀρχῇ with Mike Stallard, PhD, Executive Director for the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics**

Dr. Mark McGinniss

It was my pleasure to share a discussion that Mike and I had about this past year's CDH Conference hosted at Calvary University in Kansas City, MO, September 18-19, 2019.

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**MARK:** What was the reason that the CDH chose social justice and race as its theme for 2019? What were you hoping to accomplish?

**MIKE:** The Steering Committee gravitated to this issue for several reasons. First, it is a major emphasis among evangelicals. In fact, social justice and race have been growing as a concern for decades among those who claim to be born-again believers, especially the younger generations.

Second, my own personal thoughts move in that direction due to my passion for urban outreach and my work for the Friends of Israel. I consider anti-Semitism to be the number one social justice issue in the world. We must stand against such evil thinking that has come to affect our theology. That is why I did my own paper for the Council on anti-Semitism and Palestinian Liberation Theology.

Third, I was in a debate in this area over two decades ago. It was time, in my opinion, to see where more traditional dispensationalists line up on this issue. As I suspected, we were all over the map on the question. I do not believe there is a consensus on some of the specific issues. We need to keep talking to one another about these things.

**MARK:** What are a few contributions that dispensationalism can make to the conversation concerning social justice?

**MIKE:** First, I think most of us came to the conclusion that we preferred the term “biblical justice” to “social justice” to talk about the issues. The term “social justice” has been hijacked by the far left in political discourse and now carries with it a lot of baggage that may or may not fit into our theology based on the particular issue being discussed. Consequently, it is much more productive to view the issues in biblical perspective with biblical language rather than use the language of modern socialization.

Second, I think dispensationalists help the church to see that the Great Commission is still the major focus of biblical ministry, although we certainly believe we should love people in appropriate social engagement along biblical lines along the way. Reaching and teaching is still at the heart of a Christian’s mission in the world.

Third, I think dispensationalism helps to prevent Christian social justice warriors from stealing the doctrine of the kingdom from us. Much of the language we hear on that side sounds like rehashed postmillennial visions or over-the-top inaugurated eschatology that keeps us from the proper balance of focusing on the future as one key way to live in the present (see 1 Peter 1:13 in context). We need to make sure that the social justice focus of today does not stifle our biblical eschatology.

**MARK:** Based on the papers presented, how would you like to see the church respond to the issue of social justice?

**MIKE:** First, the articles covered the whole range of biblical literature. I was pleased that many Old Testament sections were covered including Genesis, the Torah, and the entire Old Testament. We also had many New Testament presentations as well as theological formulations. In addition, some church history perspectives emerged. The wide range should be duplicated to some degree in church ministry, especially in pastoral preaching and teaching. No part of the Bible should escape our attention as we apply God’s revelation to our lives on the pertinent areas. While dispensationalists do not believe the Old Testament is a rule of life for church saints, we do believe it is a treasure trove of wisdom application for issues that we face. Second, it seems to me that aggressive evangelism and church

planting should be part of our thinking and practice. At least two articles addressed missions and the gospel directly while many others touched upon it in relation to other issues. Invariably, social changes occur in the lives of most people who come to faith in Christ and get involved in strong, viable local churches.

Second, dispensationalists should not be afraid to focus on sound doctrine. We don't argue the finer points of the panorama of the ages to win arguments but to understand the whole counsel of God and create a complete Christian worldview by which we live. Our discussions helped us to understand that doctrinal formulations are still important while we press upon the issues of biblical justice in real life.

Third, we should not be afraid to do ministries of compassion. Almost all of us support this idea. There are disagreements about whether the impetus ought to be for individual believers or for local churches, what the priority list is for compassion ministries, etc. It is my judgment that ministries of compassion should not be just for the sake of outreach (although that is quite natural) but also because all people are made in the image of God and worth pursuing as whole individuals. Also the love ethic is taught in every dispensation. Dispensationalists must be known for their love for people in evangelism, sound doctrine, and caring ministries.

Fourth, dispensationalists must remain in the forefront in taking a stand against anti-Semitism in the world as we affirm our doctrinal commitment to a national future for Israel. This correlates well with our dispensational belief in Zionism and our love for the Jewish people.

**MARK:** What is the theme, dates and location for the 2020 CDH?

**MIKE:** For 2020, we are doing a follow-up to the 2019 discussions. The theme is “Dispensationalism, Politics, and Culture,” an interesting topic in a volatile election year. The

dates for this year's Council are September 16-17, 2020.<sup>1</sup> The Council will be held at the **Crowne Plaza Hotel Conference Center, Claymont, Delaware (Philadelphia Area)**

**MARK:** I would like to thank Mike for sharing the background to these articles. I know our readers will have a deeper appreciation as they delve into these timely and much needed resources for the church.

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<sup>1</sup> COVID Update: **We are still planning to have the conference. If anything changes due to restrictions caused by the coronavirus, you can find information on the Council website at [dispensationalcouncil.org](http://dispensationalcouncil.org).**