



CHURCH AMBASSADOR NETWORK

AN INITIATIVE OF THE FAMILY LEADER FOUNDATION

Criminal Justice Reform

Introduction

In the Church Ambassador Network, a ministry of The FAMILY LEADER Foundation, we hold to the teachings of the Bible that God created government for our good. When government does its job well the people are blessed, and that is exactly what we want to see in the State of Iowa. We want to see a criminal justice and law enforcement system that is a blessing to all people, regardless of color, education, social economic status, or any other societal classification.

Foundational Theology

As we take a look at criminal justice, an excellent place to begin is God's overall historic timeline with humanity. Criminal justice plays center stage in it and as we understand it, we can better understand our system today.

1. God created ALL people in His image.

In Genesis 1, God reveals to us that He created the world and all that is in it. God created mankind in His own image. When God was finished, He said it was good. A criminal justice system was not part of God's original design. It was not needed.

2. As a result of people's rebellion against God, all people and creation have been distorted by sin.

In Genesis 3, we learn of the beginning of people's rebellion against God. People chose pride and selfishness that resulted in sin. Creation for generations has paid the consequences of sin. People's sin has brought harm to themselves and to others, and it has completely distorted the world God created. God, as a righteous God, had to institute a criminal justice system that dealt with lawbreaking with Him serving as the righteous Judge. The punishment of sin is death, resulting in eternal separation from God in Hell.

3. God's solution was substitution.

Sin put God in a difficult place. He greatly loves His creation and desires what is best for people. However, He is also a righteous and perfect Judge, and sin deserves justice. The Cross was God's solution. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to accomplish what none of us could accomplish, living a perfect life. Jesus then offered His perfect life on the Cross as a payment for the justice you and I deserved. The Cross is a symbol of criminal justice. The Cross reveals God's love for both justice and mercy. This incredible gift is available to all who repent of their sin and believe in Him and it is a lesson to the criminal justice system we seek to build today. One that is full of both justice and mercy.

4. We await the restoration of all things.

Though sin and death were conquered through the Cross and resurrection, we still await the restoration of all things including our bodies and creation. Jesus promised He would return to complete what He was sent to do. At His return, true justice will be served. Sins will be addressed, creation will be made new, and we will get our new bodies. Sin will be done forever. These things have not yet taken place, as Christ desires many more to come to the knowledge of Him.

Theological Principles for Criminal Justice Reform

- 1. Government is the people's servant. This includes police officers, judges, attorneys, juries, and all other aspects of our criminal justice system.**
 - "For government is God's servant for your good." Romans 13:4.
 - Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:42-25.
 - People are not here to serve the criminal justice system, rather the system is here to serve ALL people. Those who serve in our government are the people's guide and protector. They are to hold the interests of all people above even their own.
 - To serve in government is a high calling and that must be the attitude of all who serve in our criminal justice system.

- 2. Government should be a dread for the wrong-doer and a sense of peace for the innocent.**
 - "For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. For government is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason." Romans 13:3-4.
 - As we look at our criminal justice system, it is important we understand that those who break the law should be concerned when they see a police officer or other governing authority.
 - It is also important to recognize that government is a public servant designed to protect people. Those who are innocent should feel a sense of peace, not fear, when they see a peace officer or governing authority. For many people of color, this has not been true.
 - Any true reform has to address both of these without neglecting the latter.

- 3. Justice is to be fair and balanced. It is not to be partial.**
 - "Unequal weights are detestable to the LORD, and dishonest scales are no good." Proverbs 20:23.
 - The law serves as a guide, protector, and corrector. It guides us to a better way of living, the path to life. It protects us from ourselves and others who wish to pursue a path that brings harm and death. It corrects our behavior through punishments that fit the crime with the goal to bring us back to the path of life.
 - If the criminal justice system shows any bias and does not seek what is just and true, it no longer accomplishes what God designed it to do. It not only loses the trust of people, it becomes a harm to the very people it was designed to serve.
 - Our criminal justice system is dependent on the pursuit of truth, fair and balanced justice, for all people.

- 4. We are to honor and pray for those who are in authority, including our police officers.**
 - "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." 1 Timothy 2:1-4.
 - Police officers make incredible sacrifices to keep our cities safe. It is important that we honor, thank them, and pray for them as they serve and sacrifice for us. This not only strengthens our communities, but it also pleases our Lord.

- Though the vast majority of our officers truly serve with a heart for people, that is not true for all of them. We do not honor and give thanksgiving because any person deserves it. In reality none of us do. Rather, we offer honor and give thanksgiving because it pleases our Lord. We are honoring far more than a person. We are honoring the institution and ideals they represent.

5. Criminal punishment should be relegated to a specific sentence, not become a life-long identifier.

- “To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” Ephesians 4:22-24.
- It is important that justice is served, and that the proper sentence is fulfilled that meets the crime.
- However, a person should not be identified by their crime. Once they have fulfilled their sentence, they should be able to return to society and begin to rebuild their lives.
- The Gospel is a story of “second chances.” When our debt of sin was paid on the Cross, we were not identified by our sin, rather we were identified by our new life following the payment of our sin.
- Our criminal justice system must reflect just sentencing, as well as a life beyond the prison system for those who are able to fulfill their sentence in their lifetime.