

Defunding the Police from a Biblical Perspective

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Biography

I am a Liberty University sophomore studying Government: Politics & Policy with minors in Public Health and Writing. As a type 1 diabetic, I desire to help diabetics through health policy. I value serving others like my mother, father, and brother who currently serve or previously served in law enforcement.

Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic instilled panic and fear within people across the globe at the beginning of 2020. The death of George Floyd in May during the attempted arrest quickly exacerbated people's anxiety, but not in the virus, rather, in law enforcement. The despair and horror individuals felt after George Floyd's death then turned into rage. Protests against police brutality turned into sinister riots, which consisted of looting and burning of buildings. The slogan "defund the police" became popularized by Black Lives Matter, which calls for the reduction in police funds and the delegation of police duties to other organizations. This paper will evaluate the "defund the police" movement from a Biblical worldview and the societal effects that have arisen. The paper will also focus on the injustice against police officers, the difference between a sin and a crime, church and community involvement to give police support, state and local government police delegating powers, and government overreach.

Introduction

It is essential that Christians make the distinction between social justice and biblical justice. Unfortunately, the social justice popularized today is not biblical. It is understandable when citizens are concerned about the justice system because Americans deserve a justice system that is fair and righteous and would serve God's will. However, the defund the police movement used by Black Lives Matter does not present benefits for American and has created hatred towards police. Groups such as Black Lives Matter need to be watched carefully because Christians must ensure they are supporting an organization that promotes Christian values. After the death of George Floyd, Black Lives Matter began to call for the cutting of police budgets so they could be allocated to other programs such as social services and housing. Cities, especially ones with high crime rates, cannot afford less policing. The statistics show that there were cities in America where crime rose after the death of George Floyd and continued to rise. Some cities have agreed to reduce their police department's budget and others have already implemented their budget plan. Despite the tragic events that have transpired and resulted in unnecessary suffering, churches and communities can continue to support police. Christians must ensure that their actions glorify God and not worldly objects. Christians should expect to be questioned on current issues such as the defund the police movement and reading the Word of God is a great start when formulating an opinion.

Background

The definition of defund the police has become blurred because activists have different intentions. Some support a reduction in police funds and reallocation of the funds to non-policing forms of public safety and programs such as social services, housing, education, employment, and healthcare.¹ Other activists claim total withdrawal of police funds is necessary so that police forces can be abolished.² Surprisingly, these ideas of reduction or removal of police funds are not new. W.E.B. Du Bois discussed abolition-democracy in his essay *Black Reconstruction* published in 1935, which advocated for the elimination of supposedly racist and oppressive institutions.³ These institutions included prisons, convict leasing, and white police forces. In the 1960s, Angela Davis and other activists also supported and advocated for the defunding or abolition of police departments.⁴ More recently in 2017, Alex S. Vitale's book *The End of Policing* is a police reform and reconstruction playbook for readers.⁵ Advocates of defunding the police claim that the reallocation of funds towards community programs would better deter crime.⁶ These funds would work to address social issues such as poverty, homelessness, and mental disorders.⁷ The popularity of the movement increased after the death of George Floyd and made its way into the church.

¹ Amna A. Akbar, "An Abolitionist Horizon for (Police) Reform." *California Law Review* 108, no. 6 (December 2020): 1781–1846, doi:10.15779/Z38M32NB2K.

² Ibid.

³ Tomos Hughes, "'Can We Imagine This Spectacular Revolution?': Counterfactual Narrative and the 'New World Peasantry' in W.E.B. Du Bois' Scorn and Black Reconstruction." *ELH* 87, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 179–210, doi:10.1353/elh.2020.0006.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Thomas Dutcher, "The End of Policing." *Theory in Action* 13, no. 4 (October 2020): 185–90, doi:10.3798/tia.1937-0237.2058.

⁶ Amna A. Akbar, "An Abolitionist Horizon for (Police) Reform." *California Law Review* 108, no. 6 (December 2020): 1781–1846, doi:10.15779/Z38M32NB2K.

⁷ Ibid.

A Unitarian Universalist church in Texas recorded a sermon centered around Du Bois' abolition-democracy. Reverend Dr. Colin Bossen discussed America's apparent white supremacist foundation and referenced Du Bois as well as Angela Davis to support his point. The reason why Reverend Bossen references these advocates of the abolition of the police is because the Bible does not support that worldview. In Unitarian Universalism, the truth is subjective. The congregation is free to use any piece of literature to support their beliefs; there is no creed.⁸ Another reverend, D. Scott Cooper, referred to God as a "god of many names" and continued with, "We name you as the God who..." and then would state the belief that supported their narrative.⁹ There is no backbone to the religion. Their offering for that Sunday went towards bailing out who they refer to as "peaceful protesters" from the George Floyd protests and riots.¹⁰ As Christians, how are we able to stand before God at the end of our lives and tell him we defended people's sins such as burning down businesses and looting? Unlike Unitarian Universalism, we have the Bible as our guide.

Sin-Crime

According to Proverbs 17:15, God condemns both exonerating the guilty and convicting the innocent.¹¹ It is challenging to make the case that the popularized Black Lives Matter movement defund the police is biblical when the organization has unbiblical ideology. Unfortunately, this discernment and wisdom that Proverbs also stresses is not so apparent in Christians advocating for unbiblical social justice.¹² This social justice that is not supported by the Bible is being equated to biblical justice.¹³

In late 2015, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's Urbana missions conference in St. Louis invited Michelle Higgins as a keynote address speaker.¹⁴ As a supporter of the Black Lives Matter movement, Higgins uses the opportunity to encourage the young evangelists to back the movement.¹⁵ Rightfully so, Higgins endorsed that racism is sinful. However, she also stated that the movement is, 'a movement on mission in the truth of God.'¹⁶ The issue with this statement revolves around the ideology of the organization. Black Lives Matter calls to "'disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure... by supporting each other as extended families and 'villages' that collectively care for one another, especially our children.'"¹⁷ How can Christ-followers support a movement that supports such unbiblical ideas? The Bible teaches that Husbands must love their wives, wives must submit to their husbands, and children must obey their parents. Black lives absolutely matter because we are *all* created in the image of God as the Bible states in Genesis 1:27.¹⁸

⁸ Marta Elliott and R. David Hayward, "Religion and Well-Being in a Church without a Creed." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 10, no. 2 (March 2007), 109–26. doi:10.1080/13694670500386069.

⁹ firstuuhouston, "June 21, 2020 - 'Abolition Democracy' - Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen." YouTube Video. YouTube (June 21, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_2sRPcr_6g.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ NIV.

¹² Scott D. Allen, "Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice : An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis." Grand Rapids, Michigan: Credo House Publishers, 2020.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 14

¹⁷ Ibid., 14-15

¹⁸ NIV

After the conference, Sojourners, a left-leaning evangelical group, wrote a letter to InterVarsity to applaud its bravery in encouraging the Black Lives Matter movement.¹⁹ The associate vice president for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Whitworth University Dr. Lawrence A. Q. Burnley wrote in the letter that there is a central lie within the church, and the lie is that “white people were created to rule and everyone else was created to be ruled”.²⁰ The statement was endorsed by evangelists such as Jim Walls, Shane Claiborne, Jen Hatmaker, Steve Bauman, Lynne Hybels, and David Neff.²¹ This apparent lie within the church is not what the Scriptures promote. Again, biblical churches will be hard-pressed to support an unbiblical organization including their call to defund the police. Christians are called to teach what is biblical in a loving manner including Christians responsibility to respect authority. Romans 13 discusses how Christians are to be subject to the governing authorities God has instituted and those who disobey also disobey God.²² 1 Peter 2:14 also speaks to governing authorities and that they are sent by God “to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.”²³ Christians and the church should be supportive in the police’s mission to keep the public safe.

Nature of Injustice

Defunding the police is an injustice for both the officers serving and the citizens. If communities do not have the police readily available to them, then they will be left to fend for themselves. In 2 Corinthians 5:17-20, Christians are called to be ministers of reconciliation.²⁴ However, Christians must be able to discern between biblical justice and modern social justice because their definitions of “justice” are massively different.²⁵

On November 23, 2020, the Seattle City Council voted to pass their 2021 budget, which included an 18% cut to the Seattle Police Department’s budget allocating \$6.5 billion to the department.²⁶ The Seattle City Council only expected seven officers to leave in October, but twenty-three ended up leaving.²⁷ Murders increased from 36 in 2019 to 52 in 2020.²⁸ The Capital Hill Anonymous Zone (CHAZ), or Capitol Hill Occupied Protest (CHOP), contained a “no cop co-op,” but police continued to respond to 911 calls within CHAZ.²⁹ Before police disassembled CHAZ, there were four violent shootings within ten days.³⁰ Seattle has not been the only city that has cut their department’s budget.

¹⁹ Scott D. Allen, “Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice : An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis.” Grand Rapids, Michigan: Credo House Publishers, 2020.

²⁰ Ibid., 15

²¹ Ibid.

²² NIV.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Scott D. Allen, “Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice : An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis.” Grand Rapids, Michigan: Credo House Publishers, 2020.

²⁶ P-I, Callie Craighead, Seattle, “Seattle City Council Scales Back Police Funding in New 2021 Budget; Durkan Expected to Sign into Law.” *Seattlepi.com* (November 24, 2020), <https://www.seattlepi.com/local/politics/article/seattle-city-council-cuts-police-funding-21-budget-15751199.php>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Crime Dashboard - Police | Seattle.gov,” *Seattle.gov* (2019), <https://www.seattle.gov/police/information-and-data/crime-dashboard>.

²⁹ Kevin Schofield, “Is the City Responding to 911 Calls in the CHOP?” *Seattle City Council Insight* (June 16, 2020), <https://sccinsight.com/2020/06/15/is-the-city-responding-to-911-calls-in-the-chop/>.

³⁰ “After 3 Weeks and 4 Shootings, Seattle Dismantles Its ‘Autonomous Zone,’” *Reason.com* (July 1, 2020), <https://reason.com/2020/07/01/after-3-weeks-and-4-shootings-seattle-dismantles-its-autonomous-zone/>.

Chicago City Council stated, “It’s time for our city to seriously look at cutting the police budget...”³¹ May 31st of 2020 was the most violent day Chicago had in 60 years; 18 people were killed with more than 45 others shot within 24 hours.³² May through July, there were 1,130 shootings and 212 of them were fatal.³³ Philadelphia City Council decided to cut \$33 million from the city’s police department’s budget, which equates to about 4.3 percent of the city’s projected 2021 police budget.³⁴ At the end of 2020, Philadelphia had 499 homicides compared to 2019’s 356.³⁵ The problem with defunding the police is that it calls for cutting police budget, which is severely problematic in high crime cities. High crime neighborhoods need more policing to combat crime.

In *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice*, David Scott Allen describes two narratives of race.³⁶ What Allen refers to as the Revolutionary Narrative promotes the idea that there are near-genocidal levels of police brutality and a criminal justice system that is systematically racist, which are supposedly the biggest problem facing the black community.³⁷ As it turns out, the evidence does not support this. According to the Washington Post database of police shootings, in 2019 a total of fourteen unarmed black Americans were fatally shot by police, and most of these people were attacking police officers.³⁸ Of course, fourteen Americans is fourteen too many and a tragedy.³⁹ These shootings, however, are not proof of a systematically racist criminal justice system let alone a genocide.⁴⁰ The fact of the matter is that a police officer is more likely to be killed by a black male than a police officer is to kill an unarmed black male.⁴¹ It is saddening to hear that people think police are a threat to the black community and think they are out to get them every time they see or interact with them.⁴² Christians need to attempt to be empathic to black individuals’ experiences with police.⁴³ Christians must listen and attempt to understand their struggles while also not supporting the myth that police are looking to arrest them without cause. It is not loving to uphold false principles.⁴⁴ Christians’ actions and words are to be based upon the Bible.

Covenant/Federalism

³¹ Safia S Ali, “Chicago, crime and the complicated truth behind ‘defund the police’ efforts.” *NBC News* (June 20, 2020), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/chicago-crime-complicated-truth-behind-defund-police-efforts-n1231381>.

³² Ibid.

³³ CST Editorial Board, “EDITORIAL: Chicago in Crisis, One Bloody Day after Another.” *Chicago Sun-Times* (July 22, 2020), <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2020/7/22/21334807/chicago-homicides-fatalities-violent-crime-operation-legend-editorial-lori-lightfoot-murder-rates>.

³⁴ “Philadelphia City Council Defunds Police by \$33 Million.” *Moguldom* (June 18, 2020). <https://moguldom.com/286785/philadelphia-defunds-police-by-33-million-restores-funds-for-african-american-museum/>.

³⁵ “Crime Maps & Stats | Philadelphia Police Department,” *Phillypolice.com* (2019), <https://www.phillypolice.com/crime-maps-stats/index.html>.

³⁶ Scott D. Allen, “Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice : An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis.” Grand Rapids, Michigan: Credo House Publishers, 2020.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

By allowing state and local governments to govern and take responsibility, communities and individuals can readily be involved. Restaurants can show their gratitude towards police by offering officers discounts or by hanging up a thin blue line flag. Churches can have field offices built on their property, allowing officers to know they are welcomed and appreciated by churches. Some small counties may not have any businesses open throughout the night, so field offices would significantly benefit officers. Field offices are areas in apartments or buildings for police officers that allows them to cook and complete paperwork. These offices enable police officers to recharge and may even deter crime in that area. Communities can hire an officer to work off duty during the night hours if they do not have private security. Communities can also have crime prevention attend to them for free and make safety recommendations. If communities feel the need, they can ask for empty cruisers to be left in parking lots. Programs such as business watch and worship watch are available as well. Police should continue to be governed by state and local governments. State and local governments should be able to decide since different areas of different states vary in crime. Policing is not a one size fits all.

Spheres of society, such as churches, can support police officers by aiding in their well-being. Officers deal with difficult cases that they do not want to take home to their loved ones. It would be beneficial for police officers to have a support team from the church. Departments also have chaplains and peer support groups they can consult with when facing challenging times. These groups or businesses can also get involved with counseling specifically for officers' significant others. Couples may be single parenting at times because their spouse, who is the officer, cannot get off duty and may work evening or night shift, meaning they would want to rest during the day. Spouses may also want counseling because of their anxiety when having a spouse as an officer, fearing they may not return home.

Resisting Tyranny

Defunding the police is a problem of government over-reach because citizens are not provided with safety. If only social services are available for calls, they will not be able to assist with violent crimes. Police officers are trained to deal with violent circumstances, while social services members may quickly become hurt. The states mandated and continue to mandate lockdowns and masks while also encouraging Black Lives Matter protests. There is a problem with attempting to appease the mob while not allowing employees to work. Over 1,200 health officials signed a letter approving of George Floyd protests while at the same time disapproving lockdown protests.⁴⁵ Are churches not vital to people's mental and spiritual well-being and their afterlife? However, defunding the police would not lead to government over-reach via violation of Constitutional provision. Policing is done at the state level, so the state constitutions would have to be evaluated. The United States Constitution states, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the People."⁴⁶ Because policing powers are delegated to the states, defunding departments within states does not violate the United States Constitution.

Conclusion

⁴⁵Alana Mastrangelo, "1,200+ Health Professionals Sign Letter Approving of Floyd Protests - but Disapproving of Lockdown Protests." *Breitbart* (June 6, 2020), <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2020/06/06/1200-health-professionals-sign-letter-approving-of-floyd-protests-but-disapproving-of-lockdown-protests/>.

⁴⁶ U.S. Constitution, amend. 10

People's lives would be enhanced if they understood politics and policy because it directly affects them. When discussing defunding the police, it must be evaluated logically and factually to ensure bias does not invade. Christians need to form a loving, Godly perspective on the issue and ask what they can do to help. Even when reasons to defund the police are generally disagreed upon, they should not be immediately dismissed. Christians should evaluate if the motives and policies being proposed are for the glory of God. Churches should get involved in how they can help officers and their families. As this issue increases in attention, it needs to be watched to ensure the church's and people's rights are not being infringed upon.

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