

Williams, Thaddeus J. *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020.

INTRODUCTION

Thaddeus Williams is an Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology for the Talbot School of Theology at Biola University in La Mirada, California. Holding two masters degrees and a doctorate degree, Williams has authored many scholarly articles on theology, Christian living, and other biblical topics. He has also written multiple books including *Reflect: Becoming Yourself By Mirroring the Greatest Person in History* and *Love, Freedom, and Evil: Does Authentic Love Require Free Will?*

SUMMARY

In the front matter, Williams discusses his choice to write about one of the most inflammatory topics in contemporary American culture (xvii). These topics are especially inflammatory because Western culture makes sweeping generalities about people groups; whereas Western culture once praised the virtues of tolerance, it now ruins individuals' livelihoods in a moment through cancel culture (xvii). People in Western culture are especially sensitive to issues of social justice, and conversations on the topic become heated quickly; with that recognition, Williams writes this work because of a deep passion for God, God's people, the gospel, and true justice (xviii).

In the introduction, Williams constructs an intellectual frame through which his audience may view social justice (1). First, he exhorts his audience to proactively seek justice for the oppressed as commanded in Scripture (2-3). Second, Williams describes two opposing approaches to social justice: Social Justice A, which is rooted in Scripture, and Social Justice B, a view usually held by secular culture that conflicts with Scripture (5). Closing the chapter, Williams provides some important disclaimers relevant to the rest of the book: he is not making a politically partisan issue of social justice; he is not misrepresenting Social Justice B; he is not calling for social or intellectual hostility toward those who hold to Social Justice B; and he *is* calling for real action to fight for biblical social justice instead of only intellectual assent to the idea of biblical social justice (10).

In chapter 1, Williams asserts that biblical justice relies on worshipping God as the Creator, and he explains that the most fundamental injustice is failing to give God the honor due to Him (15-17). Because mankind is made in God's image, all forms of injustice toward humans are the result of this fundamental injustice towards God (17-18). Unfortunately, throughout history the very people who claim to worship God have caused many of the greatest injustices (e.g., the Roman Catholic conquistadors) (18). Williams addresses this paradox by asserting that those people (such as the Roman Catholic conquistadors) might have *claimed* to worship God but in reality worshipped temporal things like wealth and control (18).

In chapter 2, Williams focuses on the idea of man being made in the image of God (2). If a person's worldview only accounts for the natural world and not for a higher power (i.e., God), that worldview does not logically obligate the person to believe that all people are inherently equal and valuable (21-22). In fact, naturalism (and any other worldview that reduces a person to

his body, ideology, socioeconomic status, etc.) results in racism and other forms of injustice because it lacks a foundation for basic human dignity (23-24). Williams challenges the readers to love God and to love people; if they do, they will not want to treat others unjustly as they begin to view others as God's image-bearers (24-25).

In chapter 3, Williams discusses the issue of idolatry, which is the root cause of all forms of injustice (17-18, 28). He lists several typical idols of the political right and discusses the idolatry of the political left (29-31). Williams then lists three idols that anyone seeking social justice (regardless of political party) must resist: the idol of self (i.e., trying to be one's own god), the idol of society (i.e., ascribing oneself to a group of people that will morally justify its members), and the idol of social acceptance (i.e., the overpowering desire to be liked by others) (31-35).

In chapter 4, Williams discusses the idea of identity (43). He claims that all people have a need to belong, a need that Social Justice B attempts to satisfy by claiming, albeit falsely, to be inclusive (44). However, Williams asserts that any earthly social group (including the collective members of Social Justice B) cannot be truly inclusive because it uses specific personality traits, ideologies, and other individual-specific qualities (that are not inclusively shared by all people) as the criteria for acceptance (44). In contrast to the false inclusivity of earthly social groups, the Bible claims that every person is sinful and cut off from God, leveling the playing field for social acceptance (45). Based on this assumption of universal sinfulness, the Bible teaches unity in the church through three truths: sin is *everyone's* problem; identity in Christ takes priority over any other group identity; and God is the only one who can declare a person acceptable (46-47).

In chapter 5, Williams explores the issue of propaganda, specifically within Social Justice B (54-55). He describes three specific marks of propaganda (54). First, propaganda selectively rewrites history to villainize a certain people group. For example, Social Justice B unfairly links slavery to white Europeans when, in reality, slavery took place all over the world and was first abolished by Western culture (55-56). Second, propaganda classifies every member of the specific people group by the selective history it has written (58). To explain this point, Williams cites two newspaper articles that call the readers to hate *all men* because of how women have been treated historically (57). Last, propaganda uses the specific people group as a scapegoat for life's problems (59). For example, Nazi Germany used propaganda to blame the world's problems on the Jews (and other people groups), and over six million people died as a result (60).

In chapter 6, Williams discusses the role of forgiveness in the quest for social justice (63). Citing the example of Corrie Ten Boom forgiving a Nazi Guard who worked in a concentration camp, Williams encourages readers to love their enemies and to progress beyond hatred (64-65). He then lists three ways Social Justice B spreads divisiveness: It assumes that oppression (particularly racism and sexism) best explain everyday injustices; it heaps the guilt of entire people groups onto potentially innocent individuals from those people groups; and it turns to rage rather than forgiveness as a solution to injustice (66-69). Williams concludes with an exhortation to pursue unity in the quest for social justice (70).

In chapter 7, Williams closely examines the idea of systemic injustice (79). He claims that Social Justice B sees unequal outcomes as systemic injustice (80). However, unequal outcomes are often the result of factors much less menacing than systemic injustice, such as

differences in age, birthdate, geographical location, and life choices (82-85). Williams also warns his audience against wishing for an evil antagonist ^{comparable} ~~against whom to fight~~ ^{in order} to make life more meaningful (88-89).

In chapter 8, Williams discusses how social justice relates to skin color (92). He argues that racial social justice narratives in the media often tell selective stories that promote racial strife (94-98). He then mentions that this selectivity, often labeled as “the black voice,” is in many cases the voice of white liberals (98). Turning to the topic of whiteness, Williams presents an example of a women’s conference on the topic of peace, which spoke against whiteness as an evil, thieving, destructive force (101). He then presents several arguments explaining that this approach to racism in the West is actually divisive and offensive, as it labels an uncontrollable physical trait with negative, controllable characteristics (102-106).

In chapter 9, Williams emphasizes the importance of keeping the ~~heart~~ of the gospel as the first priority in the church and allowing social justice to follow as a result (110-112). He notes the important distinction between earning salvation by fighting for social justice versus fighting for social justice *because* of the free gift of salvation (113). Social Justice B presents an endless list of injustices to rectify before a person can truly be declared “not guilty” in the eyes of the masses; this often leads a person to fling guilt onto others in an attempt to feel justified, which is incredibly polarizing (114-115). However, because a person does not have to be justified by the masses in order to be saved, Williams asserts that social justice is not an integral part of the gospel; instead, he argues that social justice flows from the gospel as a result of worshipping the Creator (118).

In chapter 10, Williams explains that the Social Justice B mindset only processes the world and injustices through the lens of oppression (127-128). He calls this mindset Tribes thinking, which claims oppression comes from either Christians, racists, Islamophobes, homophobes, capitalists, or sexists (particularly patriarchists) (124). Tribes thinking finds oppression in situations of unequal outcome that, in reality, could be better explained by much less menacing factors (128-130). Additionally, Tribes thinking often overlooks serious injustices (e.g., women and children exploited by the abortion industry, children in broken homes, those exploited by the pornography industry, persecuted Christians, etc.) to focus on specific micro-instances of the specific injustices it opposes (131-134). Finally, Williams laments that those who follow Social Justice B often prioritize fighting for social justice instead of building God's kingdom and eventually stop sharing the gospel altogether (135-136).

In chapter 11, Williams discusses the issues of lived experiences of injustice and fear of oppression (139). He says Tribes thinking puts heavy authoritative emphasis on lived experience, without allowing others to question the conclusions drawn from the lived experience; God calls His people to listen to others' lived experiences and bear their burdens, but the biblical emphasis on lived experience differs greatly from that of Social Justice B in two ways (139-141). First, by associating negative experiences of injustice with all members of an oppressive people group, Tribes thinking incites fear of oppression (141-144). Second, Tribes thinking does not examine facts and truth but gives supreme authority to lived experience, which consequently generates closed-mindedness and does not help rectify social injustice (145-148).

In chapter 12, Williams asserts that the Tribes thinking of Social Justice B has made itself unfalsifiable: it counters any evidence against its ideas with an attack on the person presenting

said evidence (151-153). Moreover, Tribes thinking elevates the voice of the oppressed above the voice of reason (156). While God works on behalf of the poor and downtrodden, never in Scripture does He elevate their voice to infallible status (156-157). Williams concludes the chapter with an exhortation to respect the Word of God as the only infallible truth (158).

In the concluding sections, Williams re-emphasizes his bottom line and discusses a few specific topics within the broader topic of social justice (162-218). In the epilogue, he warns his readers about the predictable pattern of a Christian turning to follow Social Justice B and falling away from the faith (164). Instead, ^{we} he encourages the reader to persuade those following Social Justice B of the beauty of God's version of social justice (166). In appendix A, Williams examines several pro-choice arguments and refutes them, asserting that an unborn person has a right to life, which makes abortion morally wrong (169-176). In appendix B, he claims that Social Justice B has redefined racism under a definition that only allows prejudiced people in power to be racist; not only does this new definition cause logical dilemmas, but it can obscure the gospel of Jesus Christ by providing a false sense of justification by being part of the "right" people group (181-185). In appendix C, he discusses capitalism and socialism; while alluring on the surface, socialism cannot truly fulfill God's command to love the poor because it turns the government into a god; because of this, socialism actually does more harm than good for the poor (186-194). In appendix D, Williams discusses human sexuality, presenting several lines of questioning that his readers can use to probe their own definition of human sexuality to see whether it was shaped by the Bible or by secular voices (195-205). In appendix G, Williams concludes the book by examining a section of Luke 4 to find the most scriptural ways to approach social justice effectively.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth is a very informative read for anyone looking to learn more about social justice from a biblical worldview. Williams presents a persuasive and compassionate argument for biblical social justice that is perfect for a potentially hostile audience. However, his assumptions about the audience would not be effective on a reader who ascribes to Social Justice B.

Williams' arguments throughout the book are incredibly persuasive. He uses two effective appeals to his audience: a logos appeal and a pathos appeal. First, he uses a strong logos appeal, citing empirical evidence and walking his reader through logical thought processes all throughout the work. For example, in chapter 7, when discussing the paradox of unequal outcomes in society, Williams cites what seems like a glaring example of racism in which law enforcement in New Jersey issued more speeding tickets to black drivers than white drivers (81). As he explains the case, he cites a study measuring the driving speeds of 38,747 drivers on the New Jersey Turnpike, in which 2.7 percent of black drivers were speeding and only 1.4 percent of white drivers were speeding (82). While one could point to race as a factor in this disparity, Williams notes that the white population in New Jersey is older than the black population and that older people typically drive slower than younger people (82). In this way and many others, Williams persuades his audience through logic and hard facts. He also appeals to his audience through emotion and pathos, providing personal testimonies at the end of every chapter that help his audience associate facts with real people in real social justice battles (70-72, 89-91). Williams

uses logic and emotion effectively as he attempts to persuade his audience. However, Williams does not only persuade his audience but is also compassionate toward audience.

Williams' argument is not only persuasive but compassionate toward a potentially hostile audience. He recognizes that he is writing about "the Most Explosive, Polarizing, and Mentally Exhausting Issues of Our Day" (xvii). Therefore, before presenting his argument, Williams finds common ground with his audience: the gospel. He claims he wrote the book out of a love for God, thereby uniting his readers under a common theme as he potentially exposes some potentially very raw and emotionally painful places in their most passionately held beliefs (xviii). Again, as he presents a framing preface to his arguments, he provides four disclaimers in what seems an attempt to preemptively quench fires of potential arguments that could hinder his reader from accepting his argument (9-10). Moreover, throughout the book he applauds proponents of Social Justice B for their fight for the oppressed, identifying with them in their goals before critiquing their means or presenting facts that point to harsh realities. For example, he starts chapter 8, titled "The Color Question," by saying, "Black lives matter. It's true . . . Every black life bears the divine image," before stating that there are disproportionately more black violent criminals than their white counterparts (92, 94). Even in explaining this potentially inciting fact, he says, "Such disparities should never be used to villainize or dehumanize an entire people group who should be treated with all the dignity and respect that goes with bearing the divine image" (94-95). In this way and many more, Williams relates to and is compassionate toward a potentially hostile audience. Ironically, while Williams' argument is perfectly geared for a potentially hostile audience, he makes an assumption about his audience that could turn away a proponent of Social Justice B. will send

Williams is both compassionate and persuasive in his arguments. However, while in many ways he prepares for a potentially hostile audience, he automatically assumes his audience will unite with him on the grounds of the gospel. This is effective if his target audience ascribes to Social Justice A, but proponents of Social Justice A do not need the persuasiveness he offers, as they likely already agree with the majority of his arguments. Similarly, they will not require the compassion he offers because they likely have no qualms with his arguments. Everything in his arguments is perfectly geared toward an audience full of Social Justice B proponents; however, since Social Justice B is not founded on the Bible, his target readers likely will not intellectually consent to his conclusions. While his arguments are persuasive and his compassion could quench the fires of unnecessary anger, the target readers will not ultimately agree with his conclusions because they have a completely different foundation. Williams is both persuasive and compassionate in his arguments, but he makes unrealistic assumptions of his target readers. To rectify this, Williams could have included another prefacing chapter that briefly explains the reliability and relevance of the Bible justice effectively.

CONCLUSION

In *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth*, Williams presents a compassionate and persuasive argument for proponents of Social Justice A and Social Justice B alike. Full of logical and emotional appeals and compassion for a potentially hostile audience, Williams clearly and cohesively explains some of the most inflammatory cultural topics of the day from a biblical worldview. While his argument does make unrealistic assumptions of the audience, he provides a solid argument for biblical social justice.