

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

INTRODUCTION

Thaddeus J. Williams is a theologian, professor, and writer who is passionate about teaching God's truth to a broken world. He is currently a Professor of Systematic Theology at Biola University in La Mirada, California, where he challenges students to think biblically about the most pressing questions of 21st-century America. Before teaching at Biola, he taught at Saddleback College, Trinity Law School, L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland and Holland, Blackstone Legal Fellowship, and the Federalist Society. He has written other influential works including *Revering God: How to Marvel at Your Maker*, *Don't Follow Your Heart: Boldly Breaking the Ten Commandments of Self-Worship*, and *God Reforms Hearts: Rethinking Free Will and the Problem of Evil*.

SUMMARY

In the front matter, Thaddeus Williams explains his reasoning behind writing *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth* (xvii-xix). He shares that people from his generation, even while claiming to be tolerant and nonjudgmental, have become some of the most judgmental people the world has ever seen (xvii). Furthermore, he expresses that technology, news feeds, and social media have given people instant access to innumerable amounts of unjust events in the world today (xviii). These platforms have contributed to a culture that is not afraid

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to speak out against what they believe to be injustice (xviii). Williams concludes by explaining that he wrote this book because he cares for God, the church, the gospel, and the oppressed (xviii-xix).

In the introduction, Williams demonstrates how most people care about social justice but are extremely divided against one another because they have different beliefs on what social justice is (1, 4-7). Williams defines two different types of social justice: Social Justice A (SJA) and Social Justice B (SJB) (4). SJA is justice-seeking that is rooted in the Bible, whereas SJB is justice-seeking that is rooted in cultural ideologies (4-5). Next, Williams defines the term “madness machines” as the deeply rooted convictions and beliefs that lead people to get “mad” about injustice (5-7). These “madness machines” often lead people to portray others’ beliefs as more polarizing than they are and deafen their ears to what is truly being said (6-9). Finally, Williams reiterates that the book is not meant to be a self-righteous attempt of calling out others for their bad ideas; rather, it is intended to be an act of love towards a generation that is being led astray by a multitude of lies (9-11).

In Chapter 1, Williams describes unjust events of the past and the present to prove that people are capable of far more injustice than they realize (15-16). These injustices occur when people fail to take the godhood of God seriously and fail to give Him the worship that He is due (16-20). He demonstrates that all social injustice stems from humanity’s failure to act justly towards God (15-18). Humans must first act justly towards God before they can rightly think about acting justly towards one another (16-18). To conclude the chapter, he uses Scripture to explain that injustice is primarily a problem of the heart that no political or philosophical ideology can resolve (15-18).

In Chapter 2, Williams explains that every human must be treated as an image bearer of God who has innate and immeasurable value no matter what he looks like, believes, says, or does (24). He explains that, from a naturalistic worldview, there is no reason to value every human being (23-24). If the world is only material and nothing more, then there is no moral reason why people with greater capabilities should not be valued more than people with lesser capabilities; therefore, seeing the image of God in all people is necessary for pursuing true justice (23-24). Viewing all people as image-bearers of God is necessary but unnatural; thus, the Holy Spirit must work in people's hearts in order for them to see the image of God in all of humanity (24-25).

In Chapter 3, Williams describes humanity's natural tendency to worship creation rather than the true God who is the source of all that is right and just (28). Williams elaborates on three major idols of today: the self, the state, and social acceptance (31-35). He claims that self-fulfillment is not the chief end of man, that the state is not the Savior, and that seeking social acceptance will cause people to conform to the culture's understanding of justice rather than transform their ideas of justice based on the truth of God's Word (31-35).

In Chapter 4, Williams explains that the need to belong to a group is a God-given desire that cannot be achieved by identifying with people based on their ethnicity, religion, or gender (43-45). He argues that humans must understand human depravity as a first step to viewing those different from them as image bearers of God and not oppressors or enemies (48). Next, he describes humanity's first and ultimate identity as either "in Christ" or "in Adam" (47-48). Finally, Williams explains that Christians who are united in Christ can look beyond their ethnic background, social status, charming looks, good deeds, and other identities (46-51). They can find true belonging with people who are drastically different from them because every identity

fades away at the confession that they are sinners saved by God's grace (48-51). Identifying with people based on their status "in Christ" or "in Adam" leads to true belonging and true justice-seeking (46-51).

In Chapter 5, Williams explains that hate-filled propaganda against entire groups of people is detrimental to true justice-seeking (54). Furthermore, he explains that the use of propaganda condemns entire groups of people, and he asserts that propaganda is not historically accurate (54-55). Propaganda is used to blame social injustice on one group of people when reality proves a different truth—injustice is not confined to one people group, rather, it is a universal human problem (55-56). Williams argues that Christians must be sober-minded and reject propaganda that tempts them to view one individual as representative of an entire group of people (57-59). Rather, they must fight to see the image of God in those with even the worst ideas of justice (58-60).

In Chapter 6, Williams explains that forgiveness is necessary and life-giving for those who are seeking to be united in the fight for social justice (63-65). He asserts that Social Justice B ideologies seek to solve injustice by returning evil for evil, refusing to extend forgiveness, and being filled with anger and hate (66-68). Williams calls all Christians to reject these responses and to bear the fruits of the Spirit instead (69-70).

In Chapter 7, Williams explains that people from the perspective of SJB often view unequal outcomes as a sign of discrimination (80-81). He argues that unequal outcomes in life do not directly prove that a system is unjust because there are many reasons for unequal outcomes that have nothing to do with discrimination: age, location, desire, work ethic, lifestyle, birthday, priorities, and more (81-86). Williams states that people must not neglect these less shocking

factors if they are to fight against the real evils of discrimination that exist in the world today (87-89).

In Chapter 8, Williams explains that people must be willing to examine the facts and seek the whole truth if they are going to pursue racial unity (94-100). He then ^{and WC} describes that the SJB narrative paints a picture of racial injustice that is not consistent with facts and evidence (93-95). The evidence proves that many non-racial factors play into what the SJB narrative has deemed “black oppression” (95-100). Furthermore, just as it is racist to stereotype all blacks as dangerous and violent monkeys who are less than human, it is also racist to stereotype all whites as wicked and oppressive racists (95-105). To conclude the chapter, Williams reiterates that people are more than their skin tone—they are image bearers of the Most High God, and they are deserving of utmost respect and honor because of that truth (92, 107).

In Chapter 9, Williams states that justice-seeking Christians must keep the gospel first and social justice second (110-112). He explains the true gospel—^{a GR note here} Christians are saved entirely by God’s grace and not by any of their good merits (111-113). If people seek after justice to prove themselves before God, then they will be hopeless because God’s standard of righteousness is impossible for humans to meet (114-117). Furthermore, if people try to save the entire world from injustice, then they will be left to despair as they soon realize no man can right every wrong other than the One who already has (114-117). Finally, Williams asserts that Christians who understand the all-sufficient grace of Christ are empowered and obligated to pursue justice out of an overflow of the love and grace that they have received (117-118).

In Chapter 10, Williams exposes how dangerous it can be to shift all blame on a ^{was said} perceived “oppressor” and neglect factual evidence that proves a more complex reality (128-134). To operate in the “oppressor v. oppressed” worldview, understanding and discernment must

bow at the feet of SJB ideologies, and all evidence that presents even the slightest challenge must be labeled “oppressive” (128-130). Moreover, Williams describes the sobering outcome of a worldview that explains all injustice through the “oppressor vs. oppressed” narrative—great injustices in the world are passed over without a thought, and many image bearers are left to suffer (131-134).

In Chapter 11, Williams argues that SJB narratives train people to perceive oppression everywhere, which can be detrimental to their growth and provoke a false sense of impending doom (141-144). He argues that all people believe they are doing justice and explains that the truth is the only difference between those who are truly doing justice and those who merely think they are (141, 145, 148). He explains that people cannot rely on their “lived experience” for truth because their “lived experience” is often skewed, biased, ignorant, and incomplete (144-148). Furthermore, Williams makes it clear that Christians are to offer a compassionate and listening ear to those who have painful “lived experiences” (139-140, 148). However, rather than basing truth on their lived experiences, Christians are to love others by presenting a better way of thinking that seeks truth in the Bible and not “lived experience” alone (139-140, 148).

In Chapter 12, Williams explains that the SJB narrative values ideas based on the gender, color, and social status of the person communicating them (153-156). He explains how this perspective is far too reductionistic because the world has been greatly benefited by the brilliant ideas of people with different skin tones, opposing genders, and varying social statuses (154-155). People must be able to weigh ideas and arguments based on their truthfulness and not based on the type of person presenting them (154-156). Furthermore, Williams states that the poor and oppressed are not infallible (156-158). Whether poor, rich, white, black, yellow, male, female, disabled, able-bodied, skinny, fat, short, or tall, no person is infallible and free of all

error (156-158). Thus, all claims to truth and justice should be weighed and challenged (157-158).

In the Epilogue, Williams restates the stark differences between SJA and SJB, and he reiterates the dire need for Christians to rise to the call of doing justice (162-166). In Appendix A, Williams explains the personhood of a preborn baby as the greatest argument against ~~pro-choice~~ ^{abortion} advocates (169-177). In Appendix B, he describes how the word racism used to be defined as discrimination against people because of their race, but now it has been changed to mean discrimination plus power (178-185). In Appendix C, Williams explains the grave dangers of socialism (186-194). In Appendix D, Williams states that Christians must question the idea of gender fluidity because it is distinctly atheist and worships sexuality instead of God (195-205). In Appendix E, Williams challenges Christian language that promotes a mindset of war against people and instead argues for a mindset of war against Satan, the flesh, and the world (206-210). In Appendix F, Williams articulates that Christians should not be afraid of wrestling with difficult questions in life because doing so refines and strengthens their minds (211-212). In Appendix G, Williams explains that the gospel itself is not a political ideology or a formula for the poor to become rich in this life; rather, it is the free gift of eternal grace in Christ that should lead people to fight for the oppressed out of obedience to the gospel and love for neighbor (213-218).

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth is thought provoking and convicting to read. Social justice is a passionate topic in the 21st century; therefore, it can be difficult to engage with others in a way that is meaningful and not destructive. Williams does a great job of engaging with sensitive subjects in a way that is compassionate towards those who disagree with

him, while also maintaining his conviction and passion. Furthermore, he strengthens his arguments with real-life stories at the end of every chapter. Finally, the book is lacking in everyday application for the Christian.

To start, Williams confronts matters of social injustice by pointing out the faults in the thought processes of SJB. He never personally attacks individuals he disagrees with; rather, he points out the faults in their ways of thinking. This is portrayed as Williams interacts with the story of bell hooks. He states, "It would be easy to read what follows as a personal attack against bell hooks and those who process the world as she does. It is not an attack against her. Hook is a divine image-bearer of inestimable value. It is a love-motivated plea to process the injustices of the world in a way that is less toxic for her and for our souls" (66). He then boldly explains flaws in her ways of thinking and how her ways of thinking can be destructive to achieving true social justice (66-69). Calling out her bad ideas may be offensive, but it is strikingly different than attacking her as an individual. Williams' approach to confronting hooks's bad ideas with love for her is evident in this story and is sure to win more people over than had he personally attacked her. Finally, he concludes by saying, "To see hooks consumed with such "militant rage" is a tragedy that moves me to tears. I long and pray for hooks and those caught up in her ideology to experience the breakthrough from rage to a flood of joy, peace, and healing" (69). Williams deeply respects all of his antagonists throughout the book and treats them as image bearers of God. It could have been easy for him to personally attack those who follow SJB ideologies, but instead, he lovingly explains the errors in their ideas of social justice. True love leads to correction, and Williams has done a fantastic job of presenting an offensive truth lovingly.

Not only does Williams advance his argument by speaking the truth in love, but he also advances his argument by sharing real-life stories of people who have found SJA to be life-

giving and freeing. These stories make Williams' arguments real to readers as they see the arguments' implications in real people's lives. These stories are found at the end of each chapter, but a couple are particularly meaningful. In Chapter 2, Williams argues that people must not be reduced to their size, skin tone, status, or sex; people must be treated as image bearers of God who have immeasurable value because of who He says they are (21-25). This truth is brought to life in the story of Walt Sobchak: a testimony of God's grace to deliver a young man from identity politics (25-26). He learned that he is not defined by the whiteness of his skin; rather, he is defined by the unrelenting love that Christ has for him (25-26). Next, in Chapter 11 Williams explains how the gospel is the solution ^{for} to people who have experienced true suffering. Social justice pursuits must not be built upon the foundation of lived experience because everyone's lived experience is different; the Bible must be authoritative in the pursuit of social justice (139-148). In Bella's story, ^{WPCU' -1} as she looked beyond her lived experience and let the gospel define her, she found true healing and peace even amid her unthinkable suffering—being gang raped (148-150). She now is training to share the love of Christ through social justice work (148-150). Both stories illustrate how meaningful real-life testimonies can be to the reader. These real-life stories bring Williams' arguments to life in a way that cannot otherwise be done, and they help the readers engage with the topic on a personal level.

Finally, while Williams explains how Christians are to think through social justice, it would be helpful if he gave more practical advice for how these truths apply to the Christian's everyday interactions. He lays a great foundation ^{a bit ask} on which Christians are to view all people—whether black or white, rich or poor, male or female—as image bearers of God. He explains that this divine image gives all people unfathomable value that cannot be taken away from them (21-22). To expand even further, he elaborates on the Christian duty to listen with compassion and to

present truth from a place of love (139-140). However, it remains difficult to know how to interact with neighbors in a day and age where intellect and debate are not highly valued. Many people do not want to weigh the evidence, so it remains difficult to engage with them at the level that Williams engages at in the book. Practical questions arise: How do Christians present true justice without pushing others away? Should Christians be fearful of others viewing them as hateful and judgmental people? To what degree should Christians' social media pages be political? Williams should write more on how Christians can practice the principles laid out in this book.

CONCLUSION

Overall, Williams presents a strong argument for the Christian approach to social justice. This book should be read by all people, Christians and non-Christians alike, who want to be challenged to think deeply about the most prevalent social justice ideologies of 21st-century America. Williams compassionately and lovingly challenges his readers to think critically about their pursuits of social justice. He also presents real-life testimonies of people who have found hope by accepting God's Word over their social justice pursuits. Finally, while Williams presents great work in this book, he should include more practical advice for Christians seeking to live out the principles he has explained.