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# Culture Chronicles

a publication of the Francis Asbury Institute

www.francisasburysociety.com

February 2023

## THE INJUSTICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: MEASURING THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MESSAGE

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*The 2020 Evangelical Theological Society was online. This article is adapted from his presentation in one of the parallel sessions.*

We are living through a shaking time for the church, one of the greatest seismic shifts in the evangelical movement in history. The earthquake that is shaking and changing the church to its very foundations is what is called the social justice movement. I want to look at biblical principles that address areas of concern that many have about the social justice movement.

Are there injustices in the world? Tragically, everywhere you look. Are we as believers committed to promote justice? Most definitely. As followers of a just God who commands us to pursue justice, we are to be the most passionate about promoting justice throughout the world. It's a biblical command, and we have two thousand years of history of doing just that.

But we can only do this as we simultaneously promote holiness and truth. Justice is inseparable from righteousness, holiness, and truth. Social justice is a complex and difficult topic. But I want to raise

some questions and concerns I have about the trajectory of the social justice movement.

One reason for carefulness in our discussion of justice is that we must never in any way lessen anyone's authentic commitment to spread righteousness and justice in the world and to oppose the rampant

evil and injustice we see on every hand. We are to abhor what is evil (Rom 12:9).

But at the same time we must be open to self-examination lest we fall prey to a fatal mixture of truth and error in our battle for justice. History graphically reminds us that some of the grossest injustices have been committed by the very people who kept assuring everyone of their intentions to do good and help others.

- Good intentions are not sufficient.
- Identifying with victims is not sufficient.
- Virtuous words are not sufficient.
- Compassion is not sufficient.
- Opposition to injustice is not sufficient.

Our actions must be firmly grounded on a biblical bedrock of truth and righteousness, as well as justice.

One reason this is a difficult topic is that *social justice* is a squishy term. Catholic scholar Michael Novak wrote a good book, *Social Justice Isn't What You Think It Is*. That was certainly true in my case because I had been using the term for a number of years with a very different understanding than what the term means for most people today.

My wife and I lived and taught at a university in Lithuania for several years and there I gave a lecture entitled, "Jesus and Social Justice." I was simply making the point that Jesus cares not only about saving souls but also about our bodies, our minds, and our relationships, and we

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should too. He definitely cares about individuals, but he also cares about the whole structure of society, such as systemic issues that cause poverty and injustice. Jesus cares about economic and political issues like private property, the rule of law, equal justice under the law, and righteous leaders.

Then, a few years ago, I was lecturing in Lichtenstein at the International Academy of Philosophy and the director, Dr. Daniel von Wachter, warned me that social justice had become shorthand for redistribution of wealth—in other words, socialism and other liberal causes. This launched me on an eye-opening journey, realizing I had been blind to a revolution that was taking place all around me—in the culture of both Europe and the U.S., in churches, in families, and in the general culture.

In a recent issue of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, John J. Collins, professor of Old Testament at Yale Divinity School, opened his article on “Eschatology and Social Justice” by declaring, “For the Hebrew Bible, no value is more central or fundamental than the demand for social justice.”<sup>1</sup> Suddenly social justice is everywhere—in the news, in churches—it’s all around us. And it definitely doesn’t mean what I meant by the term. All the major Christian publishers are putting out books on social justice. Many major evangelical leaders and groups are promoting it.

The social justice movement is amorphous and changing each day, so it is a dangerous task to try to analyze such an elusive body. But there are some principles that seem to be common to most every social justice warrior. Full disclosure here: I have a dilemma. The longer I’ve watched the trajectory of the social justice movement in Christian circles, the more concerned I’ve become. So one of

my instincts is to shout and wave a warning, “This is a disaster, turn around and go the other direction.” But I also want to persuade those who are wavering or who are already committed to some of the social justice positions that they need to thoughtfully reexamine the premises. So if I alternate between shouting and pleading, you will understand. But I don’t want my questions and cautionary notes to deter anyone from their commitment to pursue righteousness and justice and truth in our broken world today.

Let’s talk first about the definition of social justice. Next, we will consider some foundational principles of justice, and then we will focus on how we should respond to the tenets of the social justice movement.

## What Does the Term “Social Justice” Mean?

The word *justice* is more straightforward and easier to define. The Merriam-Webster (1964) dictionary definition of justice says it is:

1. *The quality of being righteous.*
2. *Impartiality, fairness.*
3. *The use of authority to uphold what is right, just, or lawful.*
4. *The administration of law.*

But *social justice* is a tricky term. You can make it mean just about whatever you want it to mean. One thing that’s clear, social justice is not the same as “justice.”

Nobel Prize winner in economics, Friedrich Hayek, said he wanted to make speakers and writers “thoroughly ashamed ever again to employ the term ‘social justice.’”<sup>2</sup> His reason was, “Everybody talks about social justice, but if you ask people exactly what they mean by social justice, what they accept as justice, nobody knows.”<sup>3</sup>

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1 Collins, “Eschatology and Social Justice,” 23.

2 Quoted by Michael Novak and Paul Adams, *Social Justice Isn’t What You Think It Is*, 48.

3 Miltimore, “Hayek: Social Justice Demands the Unequal Treatment of Individuals,” <https://fee.org/articles/hayek-social-justice-demands-the-unequal-treatment-of-individuals/>.

Tim Keller wrote a whole book on social justice entitled *Generous Justice*, but he didn't define the term. The astute black scholar, Thomas Sowell, begins his classic book, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice* by saying that "social justice" is really a search for "cosmic justice" because it goes far beyond "traditional justice" (equal treatment under the law) and "seeks to mitigate and make more just the undeserved misfortunes arising from the cosmos, as well as from society."<sup>4</sup>

In another article Sowell wryly observes that the term *social justice* "has the prime virtue of political catchwords: It means many different things to many different people. . . . Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said that a good catchword can stop thought for 50 years. The phrase 'social justice' has stopped many people from thinking for at least a century—and counting."<sup>5</sup>

The one element upon which most definitions of social justice agree is that it involves the redistribution of resources

by the state. One of the United Nations most definitive documents on social justice stated, "Social justice

may be broadly understood as the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruits of economic growth."<sup>6</sup>

Kevin DeYoung says, "Justice means there should be one standard, one law, for anyone and everyone, not different rules

for different kinds of people."<sup>7</sup> He observes that there is no clear definition for the term "social justice."

## Five Foundational Principles of Justice

I hope social justice warriors will agree with these principles.

### 1. *The Bible speaks to all of life.*

Christ is the Lord of all of life, not just spiritual issues. John Wesley and the Wesleyan movement articulated a more comprehensive, holistic Christian worldview than any other leader before him. And besides that, he actually practiced his worldview. He lived it out!

### 2. *We live in a broken world full of sin and injustice.*

As believers, we should be the most sensitive and the most aware of both the individual sins and the institutional sins besetting our world.

1. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, my wife and I found deep poverty, the streets full of beggars with broken, crippled bodies surrounding our car at every stop. Finally, Teri cried out, "This is not the way it was supposed to be. This is not how God meant us to live."
2. Human trafficking has possibly reached the highest number of slaves in history, somewhere between 12–27 million.<sup>8</sup>
3. Drug abuse is rampant, destroying bodies and minds, wrecking families and social structures.

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4 Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*, 4–5.

5 Sowell, "The Mysticism of 'Social Justice,'" <https://sovereignnations.com/2018/04/04/mysticism-social-justice/>.

6 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Social, *Social Justice in an Open World*, 7, <https://doi.org/10.18356/56bfb5b6-en/>.

7 DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 147.

8 These sources were cited by Wikipedia. Bales, Kevin (1999), "Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy," University of California Press, 9; estimated the total to be around 12 million. The following sources estimated as many as 27 million slaves in the world: "UN Chronicle | Slavery in the Twenty-First Century," Un.org, [http://www.smfcdn.com/assets/pubs/un\\_chronicle.pdf](http://www.smfcdn.com/assets/pubs/un_chronicle.pdf), Retrieved 2010-08-29; "BBC Millions 'forced into slavery,'" BBC News, 2002-05-27, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/2010401.stm>, Retrieved 2010-08-29.

4. Abortion is taking as many as 50 million innocent lives each year.<sup>9</sup>
5. Some have estimated that Anti-Christian forces martyr nearly 100,000 believers every year.<sup>10</sup>
6. Corruption, bribery, embezzlement, and graft is rampant in many countries and restricts education, medical care, and business. Even in the church more than \$35 billion of church and missions money is lost due to “ecclesiastical crime.”<sup>11</sup>
7. University students, professors, and even pastors steal intellectual property through plagiarism.
8. We face restrictions on free speech, especially for conservative or Christian positions.
9. Tyrannical governments in Belarus, Syria, North Korea, China, Cuba, and many Muslim nations oppress their own citizens.
10. A growing approval and practice of euthanasia brings fear to the elderly and disabled.
11. Child abuse, elder abuse, and spousal abuse abounds even in the most advanced nations.
12. Muslims kill thousands of Christians each year, and they kill many more thousands of their fellow Muslims in sectarian violence each year.
13. Many governments restrict free enterprise and ownership of private property, making it difficult for people to own their own homes, to start and run their own businesses, or to grow their own crops, so the poor are condemned to continued dependence on the State and a life of poverty.

### ***3. We are called to love others as total persons, not just their souls.***

God created us as total beings with bodies, minds, wills, and emotions all set

within a social and cultural context. Jesus died on the cross to save not just souls but total persons. He created the total person and he loves the total person—not just his soul. He doesn’t dice a person up in little pieces and say, “Great, I saved this soul. Forget about the mind, forget about the body, the emotions, the will.”

No, He saved you—the whole you—soul *and* body *and* mind *and* emotions *and* will—all within your context of family, friends, neighborhood, and nation.

### ***4. God is a God of justice, holiness, and truth.***

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you” (Psalm 89:14 NIV).

Throughout the Bible, it’s clear that justice and righteousness are important to God—for individuals and for institutions, government, and businesses. God hates sin and injustice. God opposes both individual sins and institutional sins. Look how much time he spends in the Bible, especially in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, focusing on health laws, fair treatment, construction liability, waste management, equitable wages, crime and punishment, and a host of other issues of justice.

### ***5. God commands us to promote justice, holiness, and truth.***

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly (see Leviticus 19:15; Exodus 23:3).

“Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts” (Amos 5:15 TNIV).

Isaiah is a book of justice:

1. Seek justice (1:17; 29:21; 32:16).

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.cpforslife.org/truth\\_about\\_abortion.htm#how\\_many\\_babies\\_are\\_aborted\\_each\\_year\\_worldwide/](http://www.cpforslife.org/truth_about_abortion.htm#how_many_babies_are_aborted_each_year_worldwide/). Retrieved March 21, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Barrett, Johnson, and Crossing, “Status of Global Mission.”

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



2. Help the oppressed (1:17).
3. Defend the orphans and fight for the rights of widows (1:17, 23).
4. Don't oppress the poor or take advantage of them (3:14–15; 10:2).
5. Don't convict the innocent with false testimony (29:21).
6. Don't profit by fraud (33:15).
7. Don't take bribes (33:15).
8. Don't issue unfair laws (10:1).
9. Don't oppress the elderly (47:6).
10. Don't abuse one another (58:4).
11. Free those who are imprisoned wrongly (58:6).
12. Provide good working conditions for employees (58:3).
13. Feed the hungry (58:7, 10).
14. Shelter the homeless (58:7).
15. Clothe the poor (58:7).
16. Help relatives that need help (58:7).
17. Help the oppressed (58:10).
18. Keep the Sabbath day holy (58:13).
19. Don't engage in false litigation (59:4).

This is why as Christians we oppose not only individual sin but institutional sins as well. This is not a social justice message; this is a biblical message. None of this is news to the evangelical, even though some social justice warriors act as if they're the first to act for justice.

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***The belief that we should both proclaim the gospel through evangelism as well as engage in social action is not social justice. Christians have been doing this for the entire history of the church.***

There often have been times when the church has failed to respond adequately to injustices, but in every generation, faithful men and women have fought the battle for justice, holiness, and truth. Our opposition to the social justice gospel is not a debate over whether believers should not only evangelize and preach the gospel but also minister to other needs people have. It is not a debate about whether we should both evangelize and apply Christian truth to every sector of life, including politics, culture, business, enter-

tainment—everything—nor is it a debate over whether the church should respond to injustice in the world—most emphatically not. Of course, we respond to injustice wherever we find it.

Evangelicals have been doing this both/and ministry most of the time for two thousand years. So, this is not the line of difference. The belief that we should both proclaim the gospel through evangelism and engage in social action is not social justice. Christians have been doing this for the entire history of the church. This is not “progressive” or liberal or anti-biblical.

### **What Is a Biblical Response to Key Tenets of the Social Justice Movement?**

Let's highlight serious problems with key tenets of the social justice movement and consider biblically-grounded responses to these problems. In fairness, I need to admit right up front that although I formerly used the term “social justice” often, I have come to see that it is a whole worldview grounded on theological principles that are not a part of historic evangelical orthodoxy.

The social justice gospel is based on a different:

- Epistemology,
- Hermeneutics,
- Doctrine of Scripture,
- Soteriology,
- Hamartiology,
- Ecclesiology, and
- Eschatology.

And it advocates a different approach to evangelism and to homiletics.

***Problem One: Critical race theory and identity politics lead to an underestimation of total depravity and the fallenness of all human beings.***

Social justice warriors propose a different hamartiology. Identity politics says,

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“Everyone is either the oppressed or the oppressor.”

A few decades ago Marxists realized that Karl Marx’s original prophecy about the working classes rising up and revolting just was not going to happen, because free enterprise brought wealth and spread it generously among all classes of people. So, a group of Marxists known as the Frankfurt School changed their game plan and instead of focusing on economics as Marx did, they zeroed in on cultural and social issues that could set one group against another to bring division and eventually a revolution, paving the way for communism. Thus was born “cultural Marxism.” Their strategy was to set one group against another in every possible category.

**Racial identity.** Critical race theory asserts that white people are intrinsically oppressors; non-whites (people of color is the preferred Marxist term) are the oppressed. So, whether they realize it or not, whites are the oppressors and are responsible to compensate people of color for the wrongs committed by whites throughout history. A current bestselling book, *White Fragility*, flatly declares that all white people are racists.

Critical race theory says that everyone is either the oppressed or an oppressor. It says that the central human problem is racism, which is enforced and supported by Western white people and especially by the American social and economic system. It insists that systemic racism is integral to capitalism and to American democracy,<sup>12</sup> that the whole purpose of America is the subjugation of people of color.

**Gender identity.** Women are oppressed; men are oppressors. Homosexuals are oppressed; heterosexuals are the oppressors.

**Economic identity.** People with wealth are the oppressors; the poor are the oppressed.

This focus on identity politics and critical race theory is being used to create false guilt in the church across America. The pastor at one popular evangelical church spent several Sundays a couple of years ago on racism, declaring: “If you are white and you own your own home, you should feel guilty.”

Social justice warriors want us to believe—especially with critical race theory—that one race has sinned more egregiously than any other; that one of the two sexes has sinned more flagrantly against the other; that the wealthy have sinned more violently against the poor. *White Fragility* charges that, because all whites are racists, they must prove otherwise, but no amount of evidence will suffice to prove you are not if you are white.

Many social justice evangelicals have been duped by this message into accepting a new form of racism that is essentially anti-white, anti-male, and anti-wealthy. Instead of achieving racial reconciliation, the social justice movement only exacerbates racial divisions.

You don’t reach racial harmony by fostering hatred of others based on the color of their skin. Racist tweets from a NY Times columnist, Sarah Jeong, came to light, and these racist tweets were defended by many people: “Zach Beauchamp in Vox . . . Beauchamp admits these statements would be racist if they were directed towards non-whites. But they’re not racist if they’re directed towards whites.”<sup>13</sup>

Proponents of the social justice gospel throw around constant charges that the church is systemically racist. Beth Moore tweeted, “White supremacy has held tight in much of the church for so long because the racists outlasted the anti racists.”<sup>14</sup>

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12 McDermott, “Is Critical Race Theory Compatible with Christian Faith?” <https://juicyecumenism.com/2020/02/11/critical-race-theory/>.

13 Neil Shenvi, *Social Justice*, 1–6.

14 Fava, “Beth Moore Goes Full Marxist. Never Go Full Marxist,” <https://evangelicaldarkweb.com/>.

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This kind of broad sweeping charge is common among evangelical social justice warriors and provides an excellent example of the fallacy, begging the question. Moore and others, like Tim Keller and Russell Moore, often throw out these charges, but, strangely, they never name names, places, or events. If white supremacy is so common, then social justice warriors should be able to name names and provide evidence. But none is forthcoming. As the old proverb goes, “Saying it doesn’t make it so.”

### The Biblical Response

Total depravity and guilt for sin is the condition of every person in every race and every economic class and in both genders. Every person of every race is fallen and guilty before God and thus will be judged for their sins—for their own sins and not the sins of others. The theological principle of Individual Accountability collides with false racial guilt.

In Ezra 18:4, Ezra was preaching to the Jews in captivity. They were there not so much because of their sins but because of bad leaders. So, they were transferring their guilt to their ancestors. “My sins? Not my fault. It’s the fault of our leaders.” But Ezekiel, in the middle of all their suffering

as exiles far from their own homeland, did not let them dwell in pity but denounced this guilt transference. “You are guilty for your sins.”

Has Adam’s sin affected all of us? Most definitely, but we are guilty not for his sin but for ours. No one has ever been sent to hell for Adam’s sin. I can’t blame others (whether it’s their racism, white supremacy, or chauvinism) for my sins. I am responsible before God for my sins.

The Bible delivers a flat denial of the social justice doctrine of intersectionality. The core problem of humanity is not racism, as critical race theory claims, though of course racism is sinful. The core problem of humanity is sin. Oppression and injustice and racism come from sin. Consequently, we need to treat the disease—sin—and not merely respond to the symptoms. God hates oppression of *all kinds*, not just those committed by a certain race. He hates the injustice of blacks who hate whites, whites who hate blacks, women who oppress men, homosexuals who are practicing sodomy, etc. All must repent.

Total depravity means we are all broken, regardless of our race, gender, or economic status. Depravity is neither lessened nor amplified by your race, your gender, or your economic status. Someone who has been oppressed or someone who is in a race that has been oppressed does not gain righteousness or a pass from repentance because of oppression, nor does someone who is in a race that has oppressed acquire guilt because of the sins others of their race have committed.

Bad stuff has been done by every race against another, and no race is guiltless. Sins have been committed by both sexes against the other. Sins have been committed by people at every level of poverty or wealth. Instead of viewing one group as the oppressed and another as the oppressor, the Bible (and history underscores this) makes it clear that every human being is depraved and is capable of racism and oppression and all sorts of sin and injustice.

According to Romans 1:20, everyone is without excuse. Paul was writing to some who had been slaves who had rarely ever been treated with justice. Being oppressed doesn’t give them points with God or exemption from the call to holy living.

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Every person in every race and ethnic group is “under the power of sin” (Rom 3:9–19). No one is free of guilt, regardless of how much he or she may have been oppressed by others and regardless of how much injustice he or she may have suffered. This clear biblical message of condemnation for sin is grossly fogged over with all the social justice talk about identity and critical race theory. And as a result, our evangelism is blunted. Eyes are blinded to the grossness of their sin. Ears are sealed so they cannot hear God’s judgment against their sin.

***Problem Two: The social justice gospel has a warped view of Christ’s mission and of love and truth.***

When you view people primarily through the lens of critical race theory and identity politics, the sins of one group are viewed differently depending on whether they are in the oppressed or the oppressor group. This requires a different hamartiology because some sins, like abortion, are minimized, while other sins, like racism, are writ large.

It also requires a different soteriology and a different approach to evangelism. “Human flourishing” and “redistribution of resources” quickly become more urgent than the gospel. For the social justice warrior, if you love someone, you affirm them, including affirming them in their sin—unless of course it is the sin of racism or prejudice.

Recently Beth Moore apologized for her condemnation of homosexuality in the past. She says she realizes that she was wrong to condemn it, because Jesus came to love us, not to condemn us. Obviously, she never heard Martin Luther’s gospel principle that before people are ready to hear the good news, they need to hear the bad news of God’s law, which they have broken, thus deserving judgment.

Tim Keller said, “It’s very misleading to say . . . that homosexuality is a sin.” J. D. Greear declared that Christians must be the fiercest advocates for homosexual rights and the rights of LGBT people.<sup>15</sup> Why are these evangelical leaders saying such things? Because they are placing their unbiblical view of love over a priority of truth.

**The Biblical Response**

The gospel requires that we both warn the sinner and love the sinner. My wife often reminds people that God is far more concerned about our holiness than he is our happiness. Christ’s call to follow him is a call to holiness, not to happiness and contentment in our sins. Christ didn’t come to make people happy in their sins—whether it’s the sin of lust, adultery, homosexuality, materialism, or pride. He came to save people, to reconcile them to himself by forgiving them of their sins and filling them with his Holy Spirit. God never separates love and truth. We are to speak the truth in love, but we are to speak the truth.

J. D. Greear insists that we should love the sinner more than we love being right about homosexuality. That sounds very spiritual and loving, but that’s a false dichotomy. The Bible makes it clear we don’t have to choose between either being right about the condemnation by God of the sin of homosexuality *or* loving the homosexual. We must do both simultaneously. And the only way we can do both is by lovingly warning them of God’s judgment for their sin.

One of my best friends at Bible school later came out as a homosexual. When he did, I took him out for dinner and gently and clearly reminded him of the Bible’s condemnation of homosexuality. Love speaks truth. The first person I ever disciplined was a former homosexual. So I know from my personal experience that you

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15 “Tim Keller defends LGBT / Claims it’s misleading to call homosexuality a sin,” YouTube, August 30, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lUpl4pqBR8/>. Accessed September 16, 2020.



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gain nothing by diminishing the magnitude of their sin any more than you gain by diminishing the disastrous sin of lust, adultery, murder, or any other violation of God's law.

Kevin DeYoung expressed it like this: "We want to make sure the gospel—the good news of Christ's death for sin and subsequent resurrection—is of first importance in our churches. . . . We want the church to remember that there is something worse than death and something better than human flourishing."<sup>16</sup> What is often lost in the Social Justice gospel is that hell is far worse than death, and salvation and forgiveness for sins is far better than any level of human flourishing.

Social justice warriors seem to be uncomfortable with the stark black and white declarations of the Bible. Recently in the *Touchstone* journal, S. M. Hutchens said God "is offensively binary . . . his judgments . . . carry an ultimacy in which good and evil are eschatological categories he freely assigns, by which he divides the human race and judges its history."<sup>17</sup>

Language like that of Beth Moore or J. D. Greear is clearly manipulative. Fr. Gerald Murray in *Catholic Thing* said:

*The cancel culture's pervasive use of the accusation of hatred as the sole motive of those who disagree with the revolutionary agenda is a manipulative technique that plays upon the Christian's proper obligation to love one's neighbor. When agenda-driven progressives insist that a sincere Catholic is in fact a hater when he professes Catholic teaching and seeks to defend it, the hope is that the believer will eventually relent and accuse himself of failing to love that offended person, who is made to feel "unsafe" when*

*contradicted. The attempt here is not to convince by reason, but to intimidate into submission by making "love of neighbor" into an ideological cudgel.*

*The Church stands in need of courageous Catholics who are well instructed and are not fooled by slogans and coercive shaming campaigns. In the order of knowledge, the most charitable thing one can do is to share the truth with others. In the case of those who reject that truth, charity demands that we not affirm that rejection out of a misguided notion that contradicting them is hurtful and offensive, hence un-Christian.<sup>18</sup>*

This warning applies to us as evangelicals as well as to Catholics. No revival or reformation movement was ever launched with a message that was loved by sinners. It's impossible to repackage Jesus' message to repent of your sins or face the judgment of God, but that's exactly what the social justice gospel attempts.

Let's say you and your doctor are long-time friends with a close relationship and you go to him because of unremitting pain in your abdomen and your chest. He looks at you kindly and says, "I really appreciate you and our friendship. I wouldn't knowingly do or say anything to make you feel bad. You don't need to worry about anything. Not a thing's wrong with you. You're in fine health."

But the pain continues. Finally, you reluctantly go to another doctor. You walk in his office. He takes one look at you and yells at the nurse, "Call the ambulance. We're going to the hospital." He very rudely sticks an IV in you and very unprofession-

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16 DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 22–23.

17 Hutchens, "Complexity & Judgment," 10, <https://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=33-05-010-c>.

18 Reno, "While We're At It," *First Things*, 69.

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ally says, “You’ve got hours if not minutes to live if I don’t operate immediately.”

Which doctor is acting in a truly loving manner? We speak the truth with love. It’s not one or the other. If you meet a racist who claims to be a believer, you are duty-bound to warn them against the sin of hatred and of judging people simply because of the color of their skin. If you meet an adulterer, you are bound by duty to warn them against their sin of adultery. Just so, if you encounter a person enslaved to the sin of sodomy, it is decidedly not a loving action to fail to warn them of God’s wrath.

### ***Problem Three: The social justice gospel takes a selective approach to Scripture.***

Social justice is a worldview that is counter to Scripture in most regards. In the U.N.’s definitive statement on social justice, they declare, “Present-day believers in an absolute truth identified with virtue and justice are neither willing nor desirable companions for the defenders of social justice.”<sup>19</sup>

John Sanders, of open theology fame, wrote an article in the most recent issue of *Wesleyan Theological Journal* in which he offered “Six Strategies Christians Use to Set Aside a Biblical Teaching.”<sup>20</sup> His last two sentences present the ultimate demonstration of the inherent contradiction that comes with a deconstructionist approach to the Word of God:

*Christians have always found principled ways to revise or set aside particular biblical teachings. No Christian community follows all the biblical teachings. Today we are having a conversation about whether or not following the Bible means to enforce injunctions against LGBTQ+ people or whether follow-*

*ing the Bible means we must set these particular teachings aside.*<sup>21</sup>

So, I can obey the Bible either by obeying it or by deciding it’s okay to disobey it. Really? That sounds eerily familiar, like straight from the words of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, “Did God really say . . . ?” So much for Luther’s reminder that we must always let the Scripture serve in a magisterial role in our lives.

J. D. Greear, president of the Southern Baptist Convention (2018–2021), quotes Jen Wilkin (who has endorsed homosexuality): “We ought to whisper about what the Bible whispers about, and the Bible appears to whisper about sexual sin compared to its shouts about materialism and religious pride.” This is his way of diminishing the sin of homosexuality. That is a selective use of Scripture, while trying to appear as if one is honoring Scripture.

The social justice gospel is selective not only in its approach to Scripture but also in choosing which injustices to oppose. Most social justice warriors don’t spend much time on some of the most egregious injustices in the world. While the social justice movement loves to scoff at the evangelical movement’s lack of attention to certain justice issues in the past, they themselves focus most of their attention on a narrow set of injustices, usually liberal talking points, while neglecting massive issues of injustice that are politically incorrect but are injustices nonetheless. Most Christian social justice warriors pay very little attention to:

- Abortion, which takes millions of lives each year. They enjoy using the term pro-all-of-life, meaning we shouldn’t be one-issue Christians focusing only on abortion. This is used especially in discouraging evangelicals from voting for candidates only because of their pro-life stance. The hypocrisy

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19 Shenvi, *Social Justice*, 2–3.

20 Sanders, “Six Strategies Christians Use,” 161.

21 Sanders, “Six Strategies Christians Use,” 169.

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is evident because they are radically one-issue Christians when it comes to racial justice. Every other consideration is set aside.

- Euthanasia and assisted suicide. “Most Christian social justice activism doesn’t discuss the unborn, who clearly are vulnerable. Christianity has always been pro-life, so why the virtual silence? The aged and terminally ill who are increasingly threatened by euthanasia and assisted suicide are also vulnerable yet largely ignored by social justice activism.”<sup>22</sup>
- Defense of traditional marriage and families and their role in providing stability and economic well-being. Many social justice evangelicals promote Black Lives Matter in spite of the fact that BLM has been honest about its goals of destroying traditional marriage and all prohibitions on homosexuality.
- Human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking.
- Persecution of Christians around the world, which has gotten so bad that even major non-Christian voices are speaking out against it.

Somehow these injustices that are politically incorrect don’t rate much attention. Isn’t that itself an injustice?

### The Biblical Response

All of Scripture is the inerrant Word of God, which we are obliged to believe and to obey.

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***We find our identity in Christ,  
not in the color of our skin, our  
gender, or our social class.***

Evangelism has suffered under the spread of the social justice gospel. In the Fuller Seminary alumni magazine, Vince Bantu, an assistant professor of church history

and of Black church studies, appeals for repentance among his fellow “left-leaning” evangelicals. He observes, “It is sad that a love of justice in many cases is drawing people away from Jesus.” He says that very few Christians who are willing to protest against racial injustice are also willing to “go out in the streets to evangelize.” Bantu goes on to declare:

*We’ve either reduced Christian witness to a false binary between truth and justice, or we rationalize our neglect of one due to examples of poor implementation by others. . . .*

*Our pursuit of justice and human dignity should not weaken our commitment to scriptural authority, theological orthodoxy, and spiritual piety— indeed, these things are inseparable. As we continue to repent of our complicity with systemic oppression, let us also repent of our pluralistic humanism that has placed the flourishing of people as the end in and of itself of our theology, worship, and ministry. Jesus is the author of justice, the only name under heaven by which people can be healed, our ever-present help in times of trouble, and is worthy of all praise, honor, and glory.*<sup>23</sup>

### ***Problem Four: Social justice responds to racism with more racism.***

Social justice warriors advocate injustice to rectify injustice, but this never is a remedy. They advocate a new strident racism, anti-white racism, as a response to past racism. Also troubling is the common linkage between racism and socialism. “In order to truly be anti-racist,” Ibram X. Kendi argues, “you also have to truly be anti-capitalist.”<sup>24</sup>

22 Mark Tooley, “What’s Christian Social Justice?” *Juicy Ecumenism*, October 27, 2018.

23 Bantu, “Committing to Jesus, Against False Binaries,” 87.

24 “How to be an Antiracist,” *Interview with Democracy Now*, 13 Aug 2019. [https://www.democracynow.org/2019/8/13/ibram\\_x\\_kendi\\_class\\_race\\_capitalism/](https://www.democracynow.org/2019/8/13/ibram_x_kendi_class_race_capitalism/).

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## The Biblical Response

Tim Keller says, “When Jesus suffered with us, he was identifying with the oppressed—*not with their oppressors*. . . Jesus came to identify with the poor and the oppressed.”<sup>25</sup> This sounds very spiritual, but Keller fails to remember one little detail, namely, that Christ died for all—both the oppressed and the oppressor—and further, that most people fit into both categories at different times. The Bible is clear that we find our identity in Christ, not in our skin color, our gender, our social class, or even whether we are oppressed or an oppressor. We find our identity in Christ, not in the color of our skin, our gender, or our social class.

The letter to Romans is addressed to all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people (1:7). Christians in Rome represented many ethnic groups, both oppressed and oppressors. Twenty-five percent of the population were slaves. There were many liberationist movements around. Paul could have easily endorsed one of the many social justice movements of his day. But there is no command from Paul telling the Roman Christians that they were racists because they were Romans, an ethnic group which had enslaved most of the world, and that they should pay reparations to the non-Roman Christians.

Contrary to critical race theory, we are more than our race. All human beings share much more than what makes them different: all created by God, all fallen, and all invited to salvation by Christ. Scripture recognizes the reality of nations and people groups but never sanctions judging someone according to their race. Scripture makes it clear that, in Christ, not only are we new creatures but also that we are united with everyone else in the Body of Christ—both those who formerly oppressed us and those who were oppressed (1 Cor 12).

Romans 12:16 tells us to live in harmony with one another. Do not think you

are superior or wiser than everyone else. That speaks to the former skinhead, the former KKK member, the former sodomite, the former Communist, the former adulterer, and the former gossiper. And yet most of us have cringed with all the virtue signaling from social justice warriors as they ostentatiously demonstrated their superior moral standards.

Romans 12:17–20 reminds us not to repay evil for evil. Live at peace with everyone. Don’t take revenge. Leave room for God’s wrath. Minister to your enemy. This is not very compatible with critical race theory.

Romans 15:7 says accept one another just as Christ accepted you.

There are two sides of this good news:

1. I don’t have to prove to you that I’m not a racist just because I’m white anymore than you need to prove to me that you are a racist because you are a certain color.
2. None of us is a hostage of our color. We are free in Christ. If we have experienced discrimination or injustice, then we are first commanded to forgive and second commanded to reach out for reconciliation to those who have abused us.

### ***Problem Five: Social justice warriors want to downplay the Bible’s condemnation of homosexuality.***

Social justice warriors advocate that gender is a choice, that sexual preference is not an aberration or a mental illness; it is a human right, a choice. They deny that heterosexuality is normal and insist that sexual sins are no more serious than any other sins. And, ironically, they also insist that gender is a choice while, oddly enough, also saying that sexual orientation does not change with conversion. So you can be a “gay Christian” though celibate. There was a whole conference endorsed by Tim Keller for “gay Christians.”

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<sup>25</sup> Keller, *Generous Justice*, 225.



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Allberry, who formerly worked with Ravi Zacharias, wrote a book entitled, *Is God Anti-Gay?* He promotes the view that “once gay, always gay” is true even after conversion. He works with a group called Living Out, which many evangelical leaders, such as Mark Dever and Tim Keller, have endorsed.

More recently, social justice warriors have begun using a tactic that denounces the “idolatry of the family” by evangelicals. This is a classic Marxist move to attack the biblical mandate for a man and a woman to be married and raise a family.

### The Biblical Response

God’s call for holy sexual conduct is non-negotiable. God clearly condemns homosexuality. And the Bible clearly declares that upon salvation we become a new creation, and the old has gone. (It may be true that some people are homosexual because God has given them over to it because of their sinful desires, as Romans 1:24 says.)

J. D. Greear can try to say that God whispers about sexual sin and especially about homosexuality, but Bible words like “abomination” and “shameful” don’t sound like whispering to me. Social justice advocates like Allberry claim that a sodomite can harbor attitudes and feelings that the Bible says are abominable, but as long as they don’t act on them, they are okay. This misses the fact that biblical hamartiology focuses not only on actions but also on attitudes and feelings. Even in the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments prohibit certain feelings, such as coveting. Jesus goes even further, saying that if you even look on a woman to lust after her is sin.<sup>26</sup>

Some call homosexuality a cross “gay Christians” must bear, but this misses the obvious point that one cannot pick up one’s sins and carry them while at the same time following Christ. Such labels as “gay Christians” are no more viable than “Christian

adulterer,” “Christian prostitute,” “Christian pedophile,” or “Christian jihadist.”

### ***Problem Six: Social justice is guided by neo-Marxist principles.***

What is the relationship between cultural Marxism and the social justice movement? Tim Keller approvingly quotes Marx and talks about his long-admiration for the Frankfurt School, which was Marxist. Social justice finds its roots in cultural Marxism as we see by their quoting Marx in a positive light. Social justice mirrors the philosophy and practice of cultural Marxism in several ways:

- Identity politics,
- Critical race theory,
- Promotion of socialism,
- Destruction of the present institutions,
- Advocating the same issues in similar ways, and
- Defense of homosexuality.

### The Biblical Response

We don’t look to doctrines of demons for our inspiration (see 1 Tim 4:1).

The rule of law is necessary and biblical, but an over-reliance on government inevitably brings a loss of freedom and increased likelihood of tyranny. Social justice is built on a distorted view of truth and logic. It is deaf to the lessons of history. It seems that social justice advocates forget that when God brings justice, it will mean judgment for sinners and the wicked of all races, classes, and personality types, as well as both genders. God will bring justice, holiness, and truth and that means judgment for sinners and the wicked.

### **Conclusion**

Bishop Janes, in his introduction to Bishop R. S. Foster’s book, *Christian Purity*, said:

*A holy church would soon make a holy world. If the Church were “without spot, or wrinkle, or any*

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26 “Social Justice Gospel,” Evangelical Dark Web, September 19, 2020.

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*such thing,” her light could not be hid. When the Church puts on her entire strength, her influence must be triumphant in the world. When her hearts, and hands, and means, and influences are all devoted to God and his cause, her aggressive movements will be mighty, will be world-saving.<sup>27</sup>*

You can see why I’m concerned that in spite of noble intentions on the part of some, the social justice gospel is undermining the church all while promoting what seems like a noble cause. I consider the pseudo-gospel of the social justice movement the single greatest threat to biblical faith in our generation.

When you take a closer look through the lens of Scripture, you see that in actuality the social justice gospel is no gospel at all. In truth it is a false gospel, as Paul warned us. It is not good news; it is bad news, as it promotes living as a victim. It foists false guilt for sins committed by

previous generations. It fans the flames of racism while erecting more divisions instead of fostering reconciliation. It focuses on liberal agenda points for one political party instead of offering real solutions and healing for the full range of actual injustices and institutional sins we face.

Yet it ignores the injustice of neglecting the murder of the unborn, the injustice of neglecting victims of human trafficking, the injustice of lower expectations for certain minority groups, and the injustice of not speaking the truth about sin and God’s judgment on sin. It promotes a new racism and hatred under the guise of antiracism. It lowers more people into poverty through redistribution of wealth. It encourages lawlessness in the name of justice.

We must recover a vision of justice, holiness, and truth—and it begins with each of us living under the authority of God’s Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit as we seek to spread the Gospel, redeem individuals, reform society, and walk faithfully in obedience to our Lord.

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<sup>27</sup> Foster, *Christian Purity*, 13.

### Recommended Books and Resources on Social Justice

Allen, Scott David. *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Credo House Publishers, 2020. This a clearly-written biblically-grounded book on social justice from an evangelical perspective.

Baucham, Voddie, “Defining Social Justice,” YouTube, <https://youtu.be/YFNOP2IqwoY/>.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Fault Lines—the Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism’s Looming Catastrophe*. Washington, D.C.: Salem Books, Regnery Publishing, 2021. A powerful response by an outstanding black scholar and preacher to the social justice message, especially about race.

Beneton, Philippe. *Equality by Default: An Essay on Modernity as Confinement*. Trans. Ralph Hancock. Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2016.

Dayton, Donald W. *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*. 1st ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1976. Highlights the amazing impact of evangelical Christian leaders in the 1800s in their fight for justice, helping the poor, women’s rights, and opposing slavery and racism.

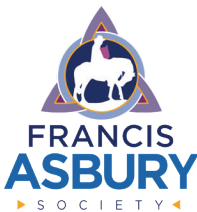
DeYoung, Kevin, and Gilbert, Greg. *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011. True social justice comes with the rule of law, private property, and equal justice. Freedom and capitalism bring more relief to the poor than a state-mandated redistribution of wealth. While we are indeed to help others, serve the poor, and seek to improve the lives of those around us, the penultimate calling we have, both individually and as the Church, is to bring the message of salvation to the lost and to build up believers.

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- Mitchell, M. T. *Power and Purity: The Unholy Marriage That Spawned America's Social Justice Warriors*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 2020. A disturbing analysis of how identity politics is bringing destruction while signaling high virtue.
- Nash, Ronald H. *Social Justice and the Christian Church*. Lima, OH: Academic Renewal Press, 2002. This is an excellent book on justice and the Bible, justice and equality, capitalism and socialism, and liberation theology.
- Pluckrose, Helen, and James Lindsay. *Cynical Theories: How Universities Made Everything About Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why this Harms Everybody*. Durham, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2021. Although this book is not written by Christians, it is a scholarly and comprehensive analysis of critical theory and the way in which critical theory has rapidly transformed modern thinking.
- PragerU. "Social Justice Isn't Justice," YouTube, <https://youtu.be/yBX-9eUtwzU>.
- PragerU. "What is Social Justice?" YouTube, <https://youtu.be/rtBvQj2k6xo>.
- Smith, Timothy Lawrence. *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1957. This is a fascinating account of how Wesleyan revivals brought widespread social reform in America, especially in the fight against racism and slavery.
- Sowell, Thomas. *Discrimination and Disparities*. New York: Basic Books, 2019. This book gathers a wide array of empirical evidence to challenge the idea that different economic outcomes can be explained by any one factor, be it discrimination, exploitation, or genetics. It analyzes the human consequences of the insistence that these disparities are proof of racism, from educational disasters to widespread crime and violence.
- Sowell, Thomas. *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*. New York: Free Press, 1999. A classic and thoughtful exposé of the impossibility of achieving cosmic justice, this book provides abundant examples that expose the false claims and objectives of the social justice movement. I don't know whether Sowell is a follower of Jesus or not, but he articulates principles that are consistent with the Bible.
- Steele, Shelby. *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2007. This brilliant, well-written book systematically exposes the desperate attempts of liberals to prove they are not racist while at the same time keeping blacks in a position of subservience.
- Tennent, Timothy C. *For the Body—Recovering a Theology of Gender, Sexuality, and the Human Body*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. A winsome presentation of the biblical teaching on sexuality, gender, and the body.
- Tooley, Mark. "What's Christian Social Justice?" *Juicy Ecumenism*. October 27, 2018. This is an excellent, brief article that provides an overview of Christian social justice.
- Trueman, C. R. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. A classic explanation of the origin and development of the sexual revolution and how it transformed issues of identity, self, and gender.
- Williams, Thaddeus J. *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask About Social Justice*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. This is one of the best books on social justice from an evangelical perspective.

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