



## Generous Justice: How God's grace makes us just

Timothy Keller

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**Mike Roberts** is a final year medical student at Queen's University Belfast



Should 'social justice' be the concern of churches devoted to proclaiming the gospel? Keller uses both the Old and New Testaments to demonstrate the importance God places on justice. From the laws in Leviticus, the laments of the psalmists and the speeches of the prophets, to Jesus' teachings and the writings of Paul, the Bible is saturated with the concept of justice. The case is built from Scripture as to why Christians should care about it.

Keller argues we must strike a careful balance. On one hand, churches exist which put too much emphasis on doing good and neglect proclaiming the gospel, whilst others proclaim the gospel but fail to engage in enacting social justice.

Evangelism and seeking justice should co-exist in an 'asymmetrical, inseparable relationship' (p139); evangelism will always be the 'most basic and radical possible ministry' (p139), but this does not negate the importance of acting out our faith.

In discussing such a far-reaching concept, Keller inevitably teeters into the political sphere. However, he avoids being partisan, emphasising the reasons Christians should be advocates of justice, and describing how to engage in meaningful conversations about it with those who hold different worldviews. He uses a helpful three step framework to suggest an approach to justice issues, applicable regardless of one's political leanings:

- 1) **Relief** – addressing immediate issues (eg food, shelter, legal aid)
- 2) **Development** – providing tools to individuals and communities that they might become self-sufficient
- 3) **Social reform** – addressing the conditions and social structures that

cause dependency (eg reformation of institutions or laws).

Crucially, Keller argues, these steps must happen simultaneously (as opposed to sequentially) for sustainable change to occur.

At the book's core, Keller gives practical considerations for both churches and individuals. Discrepancies will inevitably exist between different Christian leaders' methodology for doing justice. I tentatively suggest that readers suspend any urge to assign Keller's points to a particular party or ideology. Irrespective of one's political position, this book gives valuable insight into both the causes of, and solutions to, the injustices we witness in our society. Keller also challenges Christians speaking and doing justice in the public square. When we work alongside those with paradigms and values which conflict with our own, we should not be discouraged from evangelising to them or giving them cause to reflect on their presuppositions about the values they fight for. For instance, how does one define concepts like 'justice' or 'freedom' in a pluralistic society? How do we justify human rights within a naturalistic framework?

Though the message of this book is as relevant as ever, language has changed since it was published in 2010. In 2021, it is difficult to read terms like 'social justice' and 'privilege' without the accompanying divisive political connotations. Therefore, I implore readers to take the terms at face value.

To Christian healthcare professionals, the relationship between the gospel and being advocates for justice may seem intuitive. But it is how we discuss and practically implement these biblical truths, both individually and corporately, that Keller helps to hone. ■

See also Keller's recent publications on justice:  
[quarterly.gospelinlife.com/justice-in-the-bible](http://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/justice-in-the-bible)  
[quarterly.gospelinlife.com/a-biblical-critique-of-secular-justice-and-critical-theory](http://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/a-biblical-critique-of-secular-justice-and-critical-theory)