

# Sermon and Study Series

5 November - 17 December 2023

“The origin for this series commenced in 2010 shortly after I arrived as your Senior pastor. I read the Tim Keller book ‘Generous Justice’. I was struck time and again how much we label the term ‘justice’ by clouding our engagement with its political, legal, economic, socio and educational implications rather than the Biblical framework where it belongs.”  
*Steve Stanis*

Tim Keller said, ‘Contemporary people tend to examine the Bible, looking for things they can accept; but Christians should reverse that, allowing the Bible to examine us, looking for things that God can’t accept.’



The origin of this series of sermons and parallel studies was Steve’s reading of Tim Keller’s book, “**Generous Justice** - How God’s Grace Makes Us Just”.

Sunday	Theme
5 Nov	What is God’s Justice?
12 Nov	Justice Before Jesus in the Old Testament
19 Nov	Justice and Jesus in the New Testament
26 Nov	Justice and Your Neighbour
3 Dec	How Should We do Justice?
10 Dec	Doing Justice in Our Community
17 Dec	The Shalom of Justice

## What Christians Should Know About Social Justice

Condensed extracts from an article by [Joe Carter](#) on the [Gospel Coalition](#) website, containing substantial quotes from [Tim Keller](#) and [Don Carson](#)  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/faqs-christians-know-social-justice/>

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The biblical conception of justice is primarily captured in two Hebrew words - *mishpat* and *tzadeqah*. As Tim Keller explains...

The Hebrew word for ‘justice,’ *mishpat*, occurs in its various forms more than 200 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. Its most basic meaning is to treat people equitably. It means acquitting or punishing every person on the merits of the case, regardless of race or social status. Anyone who does the same wrong should be given the same penalty.

But *mishpat* means more than just the punishment of wrongdoing. It also means giving people their rights. Deuteronomy 18 directs that the priests of the tabernacle should be supported by a certain percentage of the people’s income. This support is described as ‘the priests *mishpat*,’ which means their due or their right. *Mishpat*, then, is giving people what they are due, whether punishment or protection or care.

But to understand the biblical idea of justice, Keller says, we must also consider a second Hebrew word that can be translated as ‘being just,’ though it usually translated as ‘being righteous.’ The word is *tzadeqah*, and it refers to a life of right relationships.

When most modern people see the word ‘righteousness’ in the Bible, they tend to think of it in terms of private morality, such as sexual chastity or diligence in prayer and Bible study. But in the Bible, *tzadeqah* refers to day-to-day living in which a person conducts all relationships in family and society with fairness, generosity and equity. It is not surprising, then, to discover that *tzadeqah* and *mishpat* are brought together scores of times in the Bible.

These two words roughly correspond to what some have called “primary” and ‘rectifying justice.’ Rectifying justice is *mishpat*.

It means punishing wrongdoers and caring for the victims of unjust treatment. Primary justice, or *tzadeqah*, is behaviour that, if it was

prevalent in the world, would render rectifying justice unnecessary, because everyone would be living in right relationship to everyone else. Therefore, though *tzadeqah* is primarily about being in a right relationship with God, the righteous life that results is profoundly social.

As Keller says, when the two Hebrew words *tzadeqah* and *mishpat* are tied together - as they are more than three dozen times - the English expression that best conveys the meaning is ‘social justice.’ Social justice, then, would be not only a biblical concept, but also a subset of biblical justice.

A true understanding of the gospel allows Christians to work for justice in the world in way that does not undermine the centrality of the gospel. As Don Carson explains...

The gospel is the good news of what God has done, especially in Christ Jesus, especially in his cross and resurrection; it is not what we do. Because it is news, it is to be proclaimed. But because it is powerful, it not only reconciles us to God, but transforms us, and that necessarily shapes our behaviour, priorities, values, relationships with people, and much more. These are not optional extras for the extremely sanctified, but entailments of the gospel. To preach moral duty without the underlying power of the gospel is moralism that is both pathetic and powerless; to preach a watered-down gospel as that which tips us into the kingdom, to be followed by discipleship and deeds of mercy, is an anaemic shadow of the robust gospel of the Bible; to preach the gospel and social justice as equivalent demands is to misunderstand how the Bible hangs together.

Christians interested in alleviating only eternal suffering implicitly deny the place of love *here and now*; Christians who by their failure to proclaim the Christ of the gospel of the kingdom while they treat AIDS victims in their suffering here and now show themselves not really to believe all that the Bible says about fleeing the wrath to come. In the end, it is a practical atheism and a failure in love.

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