

# Theology for Life

Volume 9 | Issue 2 | Summer 2022

YOUR **MORALS** OR **MINE**?

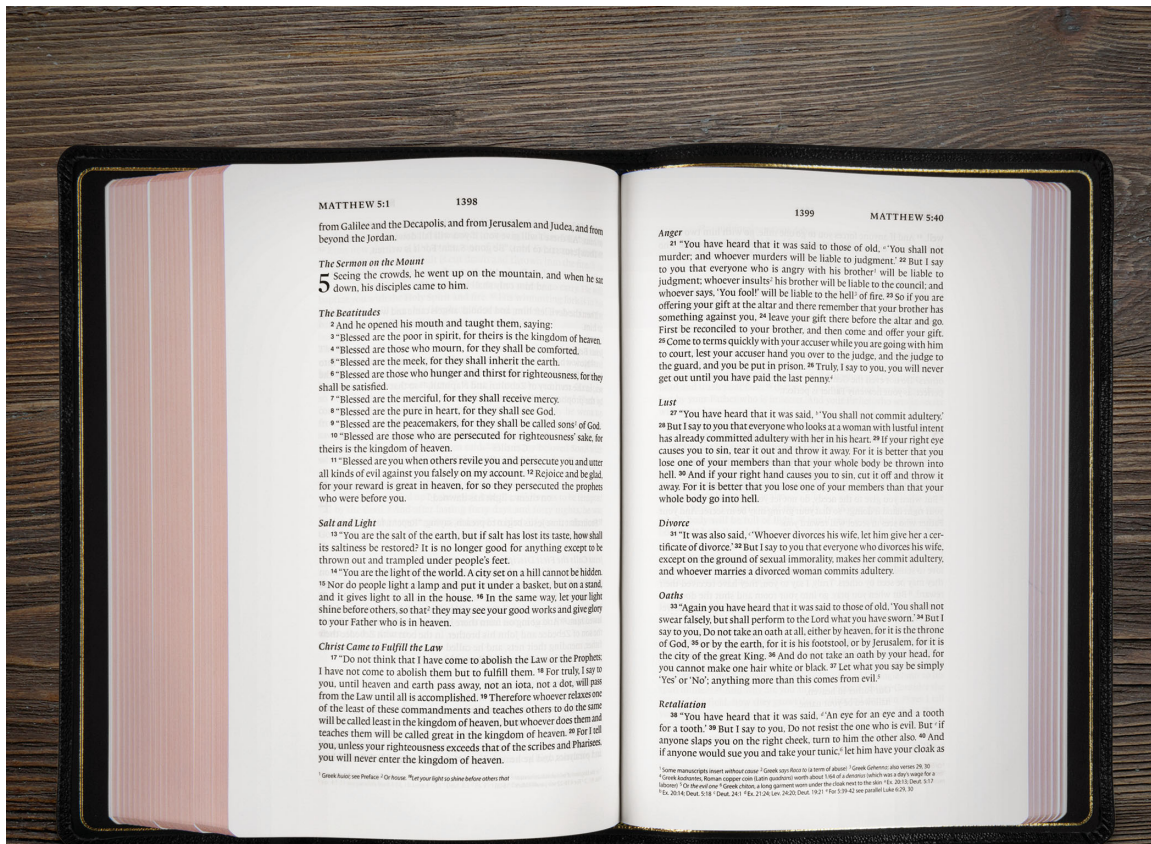
LEARNING TO NAVIGATE THE  
WATERS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

**RIGHT?**

## **Inside this Issue...**

- **Moral Abortion**
- **The Ethics of Transhumanism**
- **The Ethics of Vaccine Mandates**
- **The Surprising Truth About Biblical Love!**





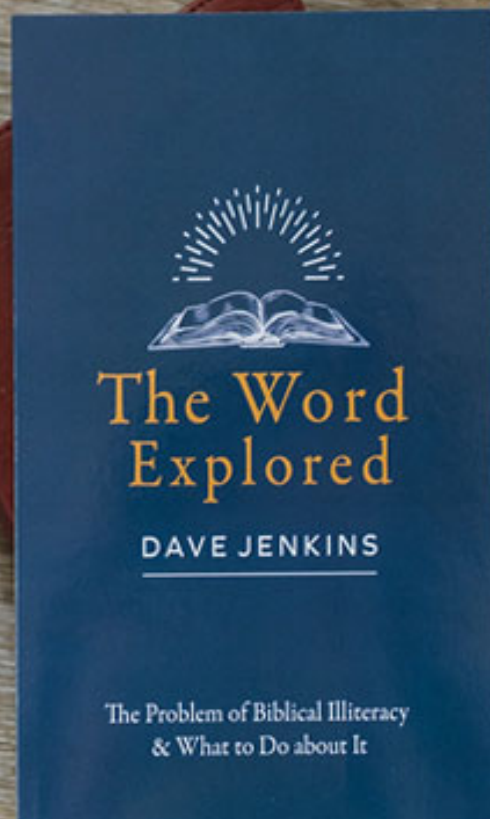
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## Editor's Corner

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March of the year 2020 will be a month that many will remember as the start of COVID-19. While we are currently moving out of this season of COVID-19 in most of the world, the question of what we learned as Christians is one of great importance. As I've reflected on the impact of COVID-19, I've seen a lack of understanding of Christian ethics—both during and after. Some well-meaning Christian leaders of various persuasions have made getting the vaccine of near salvific importance and made it a requirement to attend their churches. Others have said it is a matter of conscience. Others have encouraged people to avoid it. And all the while, both sides have vilified one another, questioning one another's motives and orthodoxy.

As members of the body of Christ, love is at the head of the list of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 1:13). Our agreement (or lack thereof) on whether or not our churches should be open or closed during a pandemic, or whether we should take the vaccine or not, is not the issue. The issue of paramount importance is love. In John 13:35, Jesus said that the world would know us by our *love*. Love is the cardinal virtue of the Christian life and is critical to the Church's effective witness to a watching world. The past two years have fractured us and not drawn us together. And a large reason for this is due to the fact that we lack a good understanding of Christian ethics.

Christian ethics are a matter of applying biblical, systematic, historical, and practical theology. It is the taking of the best of those theological disciplines and applying them to the questions and issues of our day. In a day of growing biblical and theological illiteracy, we need a good understanding of these theological disciplines to help navigate the challenges ahead. But above all, we need to love the Lord and our neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). We need to heed the words of Paul in Galatians 6:1-2—commands which include bearing each other's burdens and thus ful-

filling the law of Christ in our local churches.

A post-COVID-19 world will be one full of skepticism towards institutions, including the Church and the government. Before COVID-19, ours was a world where institutions repelled many people, but now in a post-COVID-19 world, we will see that only increase. The value of the individual and what they think and see will only increase, and it's only exacerbated by the past two years with COVID-19. With "misinformation", questions about the validity of what was presented from the government to many Christian leaders binding the consciences of people, and more issues, we are living in a challenging time for the Church's Christian witness.

Above all, what we need is love. Love for God that is rooted in the finished and sufficient work of Christ. We need to be rooted in the whole Word of God (Old and New Testaments), both individually and corporately. As the Church, we face many issues—critical race theory (CRT), intersectionality, abortion, and much more. These are not easy issues, nor are there "pat answers" where we can say, "I have the answer," because we are just beginning to understand these situations and/or issues. Even so, the Christian tradition does have good answers from the Word of God and Church history to help us. We can learn from both how to navigate not only our times faithfully, but also reflecting on how they navigated in times past.

Christian ethics help us navigate the challenges ahead—from questions on technology, critical race theory, intersectionality, abortion, and more. And this is why we are doing this issue of *Theology for Life* on Christian ethics. To be clear, we will not say everything in this issue, and you'll want more. That's why we provide a recommended reading section for more reading. We encourage you to view this issue as an "introduction" to these issues and, for further study, suggest you consider our recommended reading list for more information on this subject.

Whether you are experienced in the field of Christian ethics or brand new to these concepts in a post-COVID-19 world, we will need help. God's Word is our foundation and it is enough to help us to navigate the challenges of the days ahead. Further, God's Word is enough to help us witness effectively in our current and future social climate. We must trust God's faithful, sure, and steadfast Word, because behind it is a faithful, just, and loving Lord who always acts according to His revealed character in Scripture.

With this issue of *Theology for Life*, our prayer is that you'll be helped and equipped to serve the Lord on the issues we address in it. And that you'll consider, as we face this post-Covid-19 world, that we—as Christians—do not reject institutions, but must work to rebuild trust and faith, especially those related to the Church and gospel-oriented ministries. Let us serve those seeking help with the love of God so we can make disciples for God's glory.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*



## The Ethics of Vaccine Mandates

By John-William Noble

It would be an interesting case study if we were to go back a couple of years and present to church leaders across the western world the extent of the tragedy we have



**now faced.** I do not refer to the outbreak of a global pandemic, but rather, to the fact that so much of what the Church of Jesus Christ is commanded to do, and commanded to be, was restricted, and in many places, completely stopped. Consider the following instructions to the Church:

- **The Assembling of the Lord's People**

*“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some,*



*but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25).*

- **A Pastor’s Call to Shepherd the Flock Among Him**

*“[S]hepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:2).*

- **The Call to Preach and Apply God’s Word**

*“[P]reach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:2).*

- **The Command to Sing**

*“[A]ddressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart” (Ephesians 5:19).*

- **Admonish in Song**

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).*

- **Making Disciples and Baptizing Them**

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).*

- **The Ordinance of the Lord’s Supper**

*“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are*

*many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:16-17).*

*“So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:33).*

- **Evangelism of the Local Church**

*“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Romans 10:14-15)*

- **Corporate Prayer**

*“When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying” (Acts 12:12).*

- **Welcoming Church Members**

*“[A]nd when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised” (Galatians 2:9).*

- **Practice of Loving Church Discipline**

*“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17).*

- **Uplifting a Church Offering**

*“Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 16:1-12).*

- **Loving Our Neighbor**

*“I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (Matthew 25:26).*

*“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27).*

- **Showing Hospitality**

*“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:9).*

## **The Response of the Church**

This is by no means a complete list of what was restricted, and even made illegal in some cases, for the past two years. So, what should we expect of the Church, and especially from her leaders, in response to such a crisis?

To a large extent we have witnessed:

- A church silent and often vocally compliant.
- The new “Zoom church” and government measures being welcomed and embraced.
- Church leaders not leading their congregations upon Biblical truth but reacting to situations and accepting whatever the latest guidelines may be.

**“Therefore...if your church has been basing life and practice on the latest government guidelines...then this must stop. “**

This article is not about establishing an anti-vaccine (Covid-19 or other) or anti-government position; it is about clarifying the right biblical approach. If you are a church leader who says, *“Well, I’m the sort of person who doesn’t know about vaccinations. I don’t understand this COVID situation. I’m all about preaching the gospel”*, then this article is for you. Everything that has



been restricted over the past two years has resulted in restricting the proclamation of the gospel. A default position has been established for how many churches are dealing with this situation, and if it is not addressed now, it will become blatant sin against God, and such churches will become more like synagogues of Satan, than the house of God.

Therefore, churches and church leaders, if your church has been basing life and practice on the latest government guidelines, and the undertone has been one of fear about the possibility of spreading a virus, then this must stop. We are at a stage now with the proposal and infiltration of vaccine passport mandates, that not only must the Church and her leadership be very clear on her response from a biblical standpoint, but the Body of Christ must also be ready to face challenges to pastorally support and care for church members and people in the community who are—and will continue to be—so drastically impacted by this medical apartheid.

### **Liberty of Conscience**

One of the important issues that has to be addressed, in relation to this issue, is the matter of liberty of conscience. An important text on this issue is Romans 14:1-4:

*“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgement on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgement on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (Romans 14:1-4).*

In this passage, the Apostle Paul is addressing an issue that was causing tension between two groups in the early Church. One group believed that they should only be eating vegetables; they are described as those who are “weak in faith” (Romans 14:1, 2). The other group consist-

ed of those who believed that anything is permissible to eat. Paul identifies the one who has these dietary (legalistic) hang-ups as “weak in faith” because these restrictions are not explicitly commanded in Scripture.

**“We need to define sin on the basis of Scripture. Sin means *breaking God’s law*—disobeying what God commands.”**

The focus of the passage is Christian unity, hence Paul’s statement in verse 3: “*The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.*” The exhortation that Paul is giving here is for unity amongst differing believers. And the reason why these two groups can have that unity is not because of the food eaten, but because of the conscience on the shared bond in Christ. Our key is verse 4: “*Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.*”

To navigate how this passage relates to the Church and vaccine mandates, let’s consider four key questions.

### **Is it a Sin for Christians Not to Take a Covid Vaccine?**

We need to define sin on the basis of Scripture. Sin means *breaking God’s law*—disobeying what God commands. The commands of God are not defined or decided by clergy or religious establishments; they are given to us by Almighty God and revealed to us through His Word. Thus, if God commands us to do something, then we must do it. If we do not do it, then it is sin.

As Christians in the New Covenant, we are confident that Christ has fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17), which means that we are not bound

by the ceremonial and judicial laws that the Israelites were commanded to obey. Mankind is still bound by God's moral law, but we are set free in

**“Every Christian is free to stand on his or her conscience about whether to take the vaccine or not, and we are not to judge each other based on that.”**

Christ and set free *for* Christ. We are not, however, set free to then sin and disobey God. We are set free to live in obedience to God's commands to display the beauty of His Glory. Many of these life-giving commands have been curtailed during this Covid-19 crisis. This then may become a matter of sin. An example of a command from

God would be the call to worship God and have no other gods. It is a sin not to worship God alone. However, if I said to my church fellowship that they must not enter a pub or nightclub, and/or that they must not drink any alcohol, though this may be wise counsel in many situations, it is not a *law of God*. Also, if I were to say that everyone should get at least thirty minutes of exercise a day, this could be deemed wise counsel, but it is not binding as the law of God. It is not sinful to not take the Covid vaccination, because this is not a matter of what God has commanded.

## **Do Christians Have a Moral Obligation to Take a Vaccination?**

Our Reformed Baptist church has a Confession of Faith, which is a detailed summary of what we believe, based on what the Bible teaches. It contains this very helpful paragraph on liberty of conscience in Chapter 21, paragraph 2, which states:

*“God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or not contained in it. So that to believe such doctrines, or obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of*



*conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also.”*

One of the Scripture references they cite is from Romans 14:4, which states:

*“Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”*

The choice on whether or not to take the vaccine comes down to the conscience of the individual. Nevertheless, many have argued that we have a moral duty as Christians to take the vaccine, as the way to get out of this pandemic and because this is how we “love our neighbor”. These have also been the arguments for mask-wearing, lockdowns, and the basis for far too many Christians arguing favorably for these government measures and restrictions on churches.

However, this argument is fundamentally and biblically flawed. In Romans 14:4, Paul asks, *“Who are you to pass judgement on the servant of another?”* What he is stating here is that, as Christians, we do not have the right to judge another man’s conscience. One Christian may believe it is right to take the vaccine. They may believe they are loving their neighbor by doing so, but they do not have the biblical grounds to then state that another Christian has a moral obligation to do the same. This is very clear because this is not an obligation given to us by God. Our consciences, and the subsequent decisions we make as Christians, are not obligations to be enforced on other Christians. Hence, the Confession declaring, “God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in *any thing contrary to his word, or not contained in it.*”

Every Christian is free to stand on his or her conscience about whether to take the vaccine or not, and we are not to judge each other based on that. For anyone to add, “Oh, but you’re really morally obligated to take it,” contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture. If we’re talking about a moral obligation, we must clearly explain upon what and whose

authority, as we've previously established. It is not a sin not to get vaccinated. So, if someone says we have a moral obligation, we must then ask, "A moral obligation to whom? To the living God, who is silent on the matter?"

### **What if the Government Commands It?**

What do we do, however, if the government commands that you *must* take the vaccine? This has arguably been the most prevalent argument used by church leaders, often showing an unwillingness to engage with the issues beyond stating the need to comply with the government. This has undoubtedly resulted in the closure of many churches, many more burdened with endless restrictions and measures, and many consciences being bound.

Does the government have authority? Absolutely. However, this is not an absolute authority. It should also be stated that persecution against the Church often begins when the Church communicates that the government's authority is not absolute. This point has to be stressed because the government does not have any God-given authority to tell fathers and mothers how to raise their children, what we should and should not put into our bodies, and if/when or how churches gather to worship.

Therefore, when a public health crisis is announced and/or unfolds, it is the responsibility of the church and her leaders to respond to the situation, and to think critically. And when it comes to thinking critically about our governments, we must first recognize that our governmental institutions are not coming with a posture of worshipping God, nor feel compelled to obey His law.

In the UK, there are government agencies that have legalized the murder of the unborn and call it healthcare. They have redefined sexuality and marriage in the name of "love". And now, we have civil entities that are making a power grab in the name of public health and safety. We are also now living in a time where science has been subtly redefined as an *ideology* that must be accepted, rather than be subject to chal-

lenges or fact-finding inquiries.

In Romans 12:2, Paul addresses such wickedness: *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* Laws are being proposed and passed that are increasingly more alarming and tyrannical—especially with vaccine mandates becoming normative. We are dealing with wicked governments that are now seeking to introduce a two-tier society, with a medi-

**“Christ has bought us with the price of His life and has set us free from the curse of the law, from the grip of Satan, and from death and destruction.”**

cal apartheid designed to bind the conscience.

Whether you believe the vaccines to be helpful or not, tyrannical governance must be rejected and condemned. This is the only biblical position that the Church can take here. It is not up for debate. This is because, as we have noted, not getting the vaccine is not a sin. Nor is it a moral obligation because it is a matter of the conscience.

And, as Christians, we are not permitted to bind each other's consciences.

Now we must recognize that there may be consequences to rejecting any conscience-binding laws. Civil authorities could enforce the closure of churches and even begin fining and arresting pastors (Canada is the perfect example of this), but the Church and her leaders must stand in strong and clear opposition to this. Silence or “neutrality” is not an option. This is a matter of Christian liberty, which is a freedom we have in Christ. Hence, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:23, *“You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men.”*

Christ has bought us with the price of His life and has set us free from the curse of the law, from the grip of Satan, and from death and destruction. We are free as adopted children of the Living God, able to obey, worship, and



live for Him. This is why only the Most High God is the Lord of our conscience and why we are not to become bondservants of men. As we think critically about what is taking place before our eyes, the church must wake up and realize that we are called to stand fast in our liberty. We must remember Paul's words in Galatians 5:1, "*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.*"

We cannot and must not endorse, comply or even be silent when presented with rulings designed to bind the conscience. This is why using Romans 13 to argue for government compliance in this situation is literally comparable to using wives

submitting to their husbands as a Biblical mandate for a woman continuing to remain in an abusive relationship with her husband. It is absurd. It is a serious matter that churches have enforced such restrictive, conscience-binding measures. And this is something for which they must repent.

For example, to enforce mask wearing on the basis of Romans 13 is to endorse and embody enslavement to the very thing from which we are set free—the opinions of men and the wickedness of this world. Remember that God alone is Lord of the conscience. If someone feels it is right to enter a church building wearing a mask because they believe they're doing it in good conscience, they are at liberty to do so. Conversely, if someone believes Christian fellowship is hindered by wearing a mask, then no one ought to bind their conscience!

If this has been the approach taken by any church leaders, then they must repent before the Living God. How can church leaders possibly think that they can start fighting vaccine mandates following nearly two years of unwavering government compliance? Such leaders become a walking contradiction to everything that has gone before. This requires much humility of such church leaders, who seem unwilling to admit wrongdoing, but this is what must be done, as the outworking of the impact of the Gospel in our lives.

**"This misuse of Scripture has lent a spiritual argument to a sinful desire."**

But let me state a very serious pastoral concern and challenge here. If your reason for taking the vaccination is because you are being bullied or forced by employers or family, or because you think it's the only way you can get into certain places and do "normal things", and/or if you are taking the vaccination without any regard for what is in this medication, or if you're taking it without any thought of side-effects, then you must examine your heart and consider: is this, in good conscience before the Lord or in order to be in good standing with a wicked government or other authority figures?

I believe that some professing Christians, many lukewarm Christians (and/or biblically illiterate people), have been willing to use some of the arguments concerning government compliance based on Romans 13, and "love your neighbor" in a manner not driven by a desire for biblical truth, but to ratify idolatry. All too many within the Church have been willing to blindly comply with the government because, like the Israelites in the time of the Prophets, the government is their ultimate hope for what they truly desire: reclaiming their supposed freedoms and access to the things for which their hearts yearn. This misuse of Scripture has lent a spiritual argument to a sinful desire.

This comparison may be controversial. It certainly is uncomfortable. However, we must all check ourselves here, myself included, and ask: is our desire for God or for ourselves? Is our deepest longing to submit to the government for God's glory or to satisfy the idolatry in our hearts?

This situation, and the Church's response to it, has highlighted the ugly reality—that many Christians have become used to living like atheists in this land. We have become so attached to our possessions, comforts, and freedoms, that it is as though what we have now will last forever. What has been exposed is not that the pandemic has weakened many churches overnight, but that a lot was already wrong in the first place. This is why we can strongly argue that what we are facing now is the Lord's judgment against the Church, and the need for the Lord to purge the evil from within for the sake of purification of His Bride.

## How Should the Church Respond to the Possibility of Vaccine Mandates?

The first thing that many churches and church leaders must do is repent. If your church has spent two years defaulting to Zoom or YouTube services because the government has closed you down; if you have been enforcing masks, stopped singing, not doing communion, “social-distancing” people with the result of diminished fellowship; if your church has effectively become a factory of fear in the name of Romans 13, then your church’s leadership must repent. These types of responses to the government’s mandates have established a blueprint of folly that makes it very hard to stand against the tyranny of a vaccine mandate coming into the Church.

If you are a church leader who cares about the gospel, then fight for the freedom to proclaim it! Fight for the freedom we have because of it! We were not given a spirit of fear, so take courage! Shepherd your flock as God commands and serve your Lord and Master to His glory! Such authority and clarity are warranted. We do not look to the government or “the science” for the answers. We turn to the Living God and His perfect, inspired Word. In 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:15, Paul states:

*“[A]nd how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”*

The world does not believe in this truth, they follow the world’s wisdom. However, by the grace of God, the Body of Christ (His Church) knows the truth. May the Church stand on this with great clarity and joy. If we stand upon this truth, then how dare we have our churches being

**“The very reality of what we are as Christians is based on our unity and togetherness in Jesus Christ...”**



filled with a sense of fear? Unfortunately, this is the reality of where many churches are right now.

Are these the churches that are now going to have the courage like lions to take on the government over vaccine mandates? There needs to be a complete change of track here—biblical clarity is needed because we stand upon the word of God. This is the pillar of truth and where the fear of death is no more, where the Christian does declare, “*Oh death, where is your victory? Oh grave, where is your sting?*” Do we believe this? Do we believe this in our full PPE, as we're getting the QR codes out, welcoming people in the door? It's an abomination in the house of God.

And in order to answer the question of how the Church responds to vaccine mandates, we have to be clear about what unites the Church. The Church is not united by our viewpoints on vaccination, so how can it possibly be divided by it? If in any way, churches are trying to segregate people based on mask-wearing or vaccination status—or even worse, contemplating not letting people into their church buildings—then that is an utter outrage.

The very reality of what we are as Christians is based on our unity and togetherness in Jesus Christ, not based on our religion or our righteousness, but His. And this is where we go back to this issue of sin, which is breaking God's law. We are all law breakers; we have all sinned against God, and our very nature is sinful. This is why Romans 3:23 says that “*all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.*” This is why a Righteous and Holy God cannot accept any one of us, because we are wretched and fallen beings. We are guilty before our perfect God and condemned to eternal suffering in Hell.

This is very bad news, and no amount of good works or righteous living can change that, because our very nature is corrupted by sin. This is why the gospel of Jesus Christ is glorious to behold, for this God of wrath is also a God of grace and mercy. He alone has made the way of salvation—Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, who

reigns and rules over all. For all who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior will be saved, adopted into the family of God, and live forevermore with their heavenly Father.

**“Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. And as the Church, we stand not on ideology of science...but on the Word of God.”**

This is what the Church of Christ is—a people who have been blood-bought—unworthy, undeserving sinners, and yet united by His blood. This is why the Church gathering together to worship the Lord is so absolutely fundamental to the Glory of God and for the growth of her members. And it is why the Church can in no way be separated or segregated by race, color, ethnicity, vaccination status, views on Covid-19, or whether you

wear a mask. It is preposterous. It goes against the very reality of what it means to be a Christian who is joined together with members of the local church. Christ unites us; let not man and/or man-made wicked schemes divide us.

Therefore, as we have considered in Romans 14, we must not judge or condemn our brothers and sisters based on matters of conscience. It is also why we cannot let wicked policies and government mandates be a dividing line in the house of God and amongst the people of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. And as the Church, we stand not on the ideology of science and the wickedness, lies, and propaganda of our times, but on the Word of God. It is with that foundation, as Christians, that we must loudly, clearly, and boldly declare no to vaccine passports, and *no to the tyranny of our respective governments. We must think and pray carefully about how we can seek to care for—and support—one another and how we can love our neighbor. We do so as the Church of Christ, for the salvation of souls, and for the honor and glory of His Name.*

## To Vax or Not to Vax?

By Parker Reardon



**The Apostle Paul reminds the saints at Ephesus that they are at war.**

And not only at war, but a spiritual one; such that, even as we conduct life physically in this body, we engage in this battle on the spiritual plane. On top of this, we're ex-

pected to stand, no matter how evil the day and no matter how complicated the issues of life are. We robe ourselves in the armor of God, armed with the Spirit of God and the Word of God (Ephesians 6:10-17).

There is really no question that we are at war. All you have to do is listen to the interaction between two parties that are on opposite sides of vaccine debate. Often there is no irenic tone, the conversations lack charity, and there is more emphasis on fear than on faith. Brethren, these things ought not to be so!

In this battle of beliefs, we must remember the issue of conscience

and Christian liberty. When the church where I pastor—Grace Bible Church, in Talent, Oregon—opened up our church building two years ago, after the COVID-19 crackdown, having been told we were on the cusp of a pandemic in which millions were going to die, we engaged in a brief study on conscience and Christian liberty.

Furthermore, we need to factor in the issue of big government and its desire to force compliance using fear of repercussion. Yet, at many times throughout church history, we can observe that resistance to tyrants is, in reality, obedience to God.

The Bible clarifies and simplifies life's issues by dividing many choices and actions into distinct moral categories of either sin or righteousness. God's Word is the standard for establishing what transgresses His Law. But what about issues that are neither sinful nor righteous, which true believers can engage in, or not engage in, and still be right with God? If the Bible does not give clear commands toward or prohibitions against an issue, believers can proceed in faith and obedience to the glory of God. For example, one family might convictionally engage in homeschooling, another may choose to utilize public school, and a third Christian family send their kids to a private Christian school. All three of those families are able to maintain fellowship with the Lord as they seek to honor and glorify God by obeying biblical principles.

Regarding forced masking and vaxxing, however, we not only have a clash of differing convictions in the Body of Christ, but we also have a clash of worldviews. How so? Christians are part of a faith community that recognizes God as our Savior, Lord, and King. He supersedes all earthly sovereigns so that obedience to Him, many times, places us on a collision course with "Caesar". Made in God's image, man is a rational creature that is to exercise repentant faith in Christ, living all of life under His Lordship.

On issues that the Bible does not make a matter of sin and righteousness, each believer is to inform his or her conscience with biblical



principles, researching, seeking godly counsel, praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance, and acting in ways that glorify the Lord. Each believer may make decisions that vary a bit from one another, as to whether they should or should not engage.

For historical context, Founders Ministries posted a helpful and encouraging article, revealing how Christian opinion has differed on vaccines along with a case involving the smallpox inoculation from three hundred years ago.

Despite the fact that some believers thought that receiving the inoculation was a way to obey the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment, others were not persuaded, and built their case based upon the doctrine of the liberty of conscience. John Newton was a stellar example, who did not advocate for or against the inoculation, but warned both sides to be thoroughly convinced, basing their decisions on their convictions. Because, in the words of the Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, "to go against conscience is neither right nor safe!" Trust the Lord with whatever action you choose to take.

This doctrine of liberty comes from God, not from man. In recent months, "Caesar" has not stayed in his own lane. The earthly sovereign has not recognized our heavenly Sovereign, requesting believers who opted not to take the vaccination to violate their convictions and conscience. Such practice is far different from the religious liberty with which our country was founded, and which our leaders recognized was granted by God, not the State! Choice in matters not covered in the Constitution rest on the individual, not the government. We are bound to follow our conscience, even if it goes against government mandates.

Friends, this is a very personal issue for me, as I have a son and a church member who will soon be kicked out of military service for their stance as "conscientious objectors" to the vaccine mandate. And many others are losing their jobs over the same convictions. Some are seeking

religious exemption from mandated vaccinations based on the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment. While others have appealed to the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment, seeking due process; or the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, requesting the right to equal protection under the law.

A biblical anthropology informs us that the human body is created by God (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7). We are stewards of our bodies, which are temples of the Holy Spirit (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:19-20). God-bought believers are to gratefully present their bodies for His glory, tending to and caring for it. This body, which is fearfully and wonderfully made, was created with a natural immune system and an innate ability to heal itself when given what it needs.

**“A biblical anthropology also affirms that human life begins at the moment of conception (Psalm 139).”**

Several years ago, I had an experience in which I almost died. And because of that experience, I overhauled my eating protocol and literally ate myself out of pain. Thus, the systemic issues dissipated. If, after studying and listening to the many virologist and immunologists who attest to the dangers of the vaccines, you determine that injecting such a substance would cause damage to the body that God has made you a steward of, then you are conscience-bound to obey God over man, no matter the consequences.

A biblical anthropology also affirms that human life begins at the moment of conception (Psalm 139). Since fetal tissue has been used in the development of the vaccine, that ought to activate the conscience of believers who affirm man's dignity, which was made in the image of God. Even though the State may have cheapened human life by legalizing murder in the womb, believers must always treasure life as a gift from God, and therefore hold to this truth in all matters relating to life.

Have you counted the cost? Are you willing to walk off the job if it requires you to violate your conscience? Are you willing to trust God for another job to provide for your family (Proverbs 3:5-6)? Whether you choose to receive the vaccine or reject it, are you compelled by your faith to do so? As you make an informed decision, have you followed the available science? In a September 9, 2021, presidential press conference, President Biden repeated that we need to just “follow the science” (Fauci’s advice), as he sought to shame those of us who are not imbibing the current narrative of the global pandemic (in which millions are supposedly going to die) and shamed those who have made the decision to the contrary based on actual scientific data.

You are responsible before God to determine which science persuades you—not a simple task, as the “evidence” is all over the map. This includes some deceptive reporting that many of us have become privy to. There are *Forbes Magazine* reports that the vaccine is only, at best, 39 percent effective (July 23, 2021). With a survivability rate of over 99 percent, is the vaccine worth the risk of the—as yet uncalculated or documented—side effects? Unexplained deaths are skyrocketing. Do we know how the vaccine is related? Currently the CDC confirms that COVID-19 cases are nearly 6 times higher than this time last year. Ironically, last year the *New York Times* reported there was “no one left to vaccinate in Portugal.” It boasted one of the most vaccinated populations on earth, yet there have been multiple COVID-19 waves since that *Times* article. A country with nearly 100% vax rate and yet no convincing reason for taking the jab in the first place.

You can probably tell I am a bit biased. I’ll admit that. Personally, I am against being bullied into receiving a vaccine that I am convinced will do damage to my body. Far greater than my opinion on the validity of the vaccine is my desire for Christians to recognize their responsibility to pray, study, and seek the Lord’s guidance for themselves. And after coming to your convictions and making your choice, please don’t

force others to comply with your particular view. And especially don't base fellowship upon whether someone chooses to vaccinate or not. We are interdependent upon the Body of Christ, as we serve Him together, and we should not be discriminating based on extra biblical matters.

Are you receiving your information through resources that share your Christian and biblical worldview? Because there's a spiritual component to our healthcare decision. Remember, Paul warned us of the spiritual warfare that we are engaged in (Ephesians 6). In our kingdom agenda, we must be for the glory of God (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:31). Our decisions in battle must proceed from faith (Romans 14:23).

There's a clear divide between "Caesar's kingdom" (that mandates and bullies people into compliance as they lord their authority over others) and the Kingdom of God, populated by Christ-centered servants whose aim are to serve Christ and His people (Mark 10:35-45). Let's not allow issues of conscience (vaccines or otherwise) to be so polarizing that we might lose our ability to be winsome ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Would you like to sharpen and inform your understanding of the conscience so that it operates the way God intended it to? Consider John MacArthur's *The Vanishing Conscience*, along with *Conscience: What it is, How to Train it, and Loving Those Who Differ* by Andrew Naselli and J. D. Crowley. These biblical resources should be on the top of your reading stack regarding liberty of conscience. Soli Deo Gloria!

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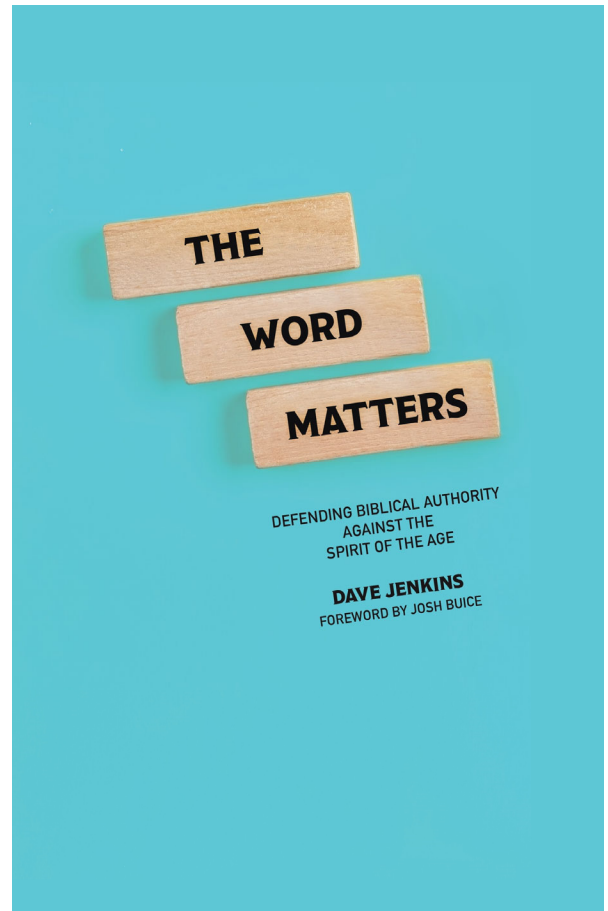


## ***The Word Matters: Defending Biblical Authority Against the Spirit of the Age***

### **An Interview with Dave Jenkins**

**By Sarah Jenkins**

Dave Jenkins is a writer, editor, and speaker living in beautiful Southern Oregon. Dave is a lover of Christ, His people, and sound theology. He serves as the Executive Director of Servants of Grace Ministries, the Executive Editor of *Theology for Life Magazine*. He is the author of the soon-to-be released book titled, *The Word Matters: Defending Biblical Authority Against the Spirit of the Age*.



**T4L:** Hello, Dave! Thanks for taking the time to do this interview. We're so excited about your new book, *The Word Matters*. The subject matter is so needed in our world today. We want to give our readers a little sampling of what they can expect with your new book. So, let's dig right in! Our first question is: why is it important to allow Scripture to inform our beliefs and what we "hear from the Lord"?

**Dave Jenkins:** Thanks for having me on this interview! To answer your question: the only way to have a proper view of knowledge for the Christian is when it comes from the Word of God. For the Christian to hear from the Lord doesn't require outside sources. Truth for the Christian must come from divine revelation. Theologians call this "special revelation", which means Scripture is enough for Christians to know God. I'll also state that Scripture is the *only* way for people to know the Lord. Scripture is to inform and transform our understanding. Scripture is binding on the hearts and minds of people, so to believe Scripture, we must also obey it via the power of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

**T4L:** In your opinion, is there a way we can be assured that seeming answers to prayer are of the Lord?

**Dave Jenkins:** Hebrews 4:14-16 teaches that Jesus is the High Priest over His people. In the Old Testament, the high priest had to be ceremonially and ritually clean and only did this once a year. Only then could he enter into the Most Holy Place where the Presence of God dwelt. So today, the only way for Christians to be assured that their prayers are heard and known by God is that they must be born again. And it's also important to say our prayers as Christians are to be aligned with the Word of God. This is the only way that we can have assurance that our prayers will be answered by the Lord. Even so, it's also important to say that in the providence of God, not all of our prayers are always answered the way that we want. In this way, even our prayers require faith

and trust in the sovereignty of God, as revealed in His Word. Our prayers are to be grounded in Scripture, not to be driven by our feelings or mysticism. In this way, we will not be deceived through ideas or feelings not grounded in the Word when we pray.

**T4L:** That's a great point! It reminds me of Hosea 4:6, which says, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me.*" We cannot truly know the will of God without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. So, why are the concepts of *inerrancy* and *infallibility* so crucial as they relate to the Bible and, subsequently, Church doctrine?

**Dave Jenkins:** Well, *inerrancy* means without error, and *infallibility* means without the possibility of error. Both are vital for the Christian because many today suggest that the Scripture is without error, but what they mean is (at least in practice) they think the Bible is without error in so far as it doesn't clash with their views on gender, sexuality, or other "controversial" issues. And if it does, they immediately think the Bible is with error, which is the opposite of what inerrancy means. But the stronger term, *infallibility*, also matters because it buttresses our understanding of the doctrine of Scripture. Since the Bible is without error and without the possibility of error, we believe what the Bible teaches and aim to hold fast to all of Scripture.

**T4L:** We see a lot of debate today about how certain key pieces of Scripture have been supposedly misinterpreted for thousands of years—such as the Church's stance on homosexuality or creation. Why do you think these texts are being challenged now, and what can we do to combat this?

**Dave Jenkins:** The "misinterpretation of Scripture" in recent years comes as people reject the authority of the Bible. As a result, those who reject the Bible aim to re-interpret passages such as those on homosex-

uality, to “normalize” their view in the church and society. Since, as Christians, we believe that the Bible means what it says, we aim to handle the Word of God rightly. Rightly handling the Word of God comes from our convictions about the Bible itself. And that’s why the authority of the Bible matters. To respond to these challenges, we need to rightly emphasize the authority of the Bible and the right handling of God’s Word.

**T4L:** Great points. We are seeing a lot of “misinterpretations”, as you just mentioned, the more society rejects God’s Word. This leads me to my next question. In your book you mentioned someone named Friedrich Schleiermacher, who apparently has impacted Christian culture. In what way do we see his influence in the Church today?

**Dave Jenkins:** Friedrich Schleiermacher emphasized feelings over fact. Historically, theologians have called Schleiermacher’s view a “theology from below”, where Scripture and feelings are at the same level. Conservative, bible-believing Christians have emphasized, instead a “theology from above”.

A *theology from above* says that Scripture is to regulate our feelings, rather than our feelings and Scripture at the same level. For example, someone may emphasize how they “feel” that they are correct about a specific interpretation of Scripture. Instead, as Christians, we don’t ground our faith in our *feelings* but in the Word of God.

**“The simple answer is that many Christians have bought into the lie that the Bible teaches evolution...”**

The attitude of someone who believes in (and practices) a theology from below will be overly focused on what he/she thinks and feels, rather than grounding his/her life in the revealed Word of God.



**T4L:** Speaking of a “theology from below”, why do you think so many Christians cling to the ideas espoused by Charles Darwin in his book, *Origin of Species*, despite its blatant contradictions to the Bible?

**Dave Jenkins:** The simple answer is that many Christians have bought into the lie that the Bible teaches evolution, or that somehow the ideas of both creationism and evolution can co-exist. The other answer is that they never believed the Bible, which is more foundational. How we approach Genesis matters because Moses wrote the book of Genesis under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. A literal Genesis 1-11 matters because it provides the foundation for how Jesus and the Apostles used Scripture.

**T4L:** How has the “Theory of Evolution” affected the worldview of many, and how has this turned people away from the truth of the Bible?

**Dave Jenkins:** The theory of evolution offers people an alternative view of how the world was made and how the world is governed today. Rather than believing that God created everything and sustains the world, even themselves, people reject this. Because believing that God created everything means that they owe their allegiance to the Lord. And since we are sinners by nature and choice, we would instead turn away from the Lord than take Him at His Word.

At the heart of this, we are deceived by our flesh, thinking we matter more than God, but are also deceived by Satan because we don’t believe the truth of His Word. This explains why people turn away from the truth of the Bible because the Holy Spirit uses the Word to pierce the minds and hearts of sinners and show them the truth. Sinners hate the light and the truth, but they need the light of God’s Word because it is the truth the Holy Spirit uses to draw sinners to Christ, save them, and disciple them to grow in His grace.

**T4L:** Understanding the Scriptures and taking God at His Word is so

crucial for us, as believers. Our biblical worldview—a correct understanding of both Scripture and the world around us, depends on this. Unfortunately, many are biblically illiterate and therefore easily deceived. Many of my neighbors are Mormon or Jehovah's Witnesses—aren't they Christians? Can you explain how such "sects" of Christianity have distorted Scripture and its interpretation?

**Dave Jenkins:** There's a lot that can be said about this particular question, but at the heart of it is what the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses do with the Bible. They both retranslate the Protestant Bible and change it to suit their theology—even going as far as to completely remove certain verses. This shows that they don't think the Bible is enough, nor is it clear, nor do they believe it is binding. It also reveals unbelief and a lack of trust in the Lord. It is impossible for the non-Christians, which Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are, to correctly translate the Bible (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:14), for they have no illumination of Scripture, which is why even being a pastor or theologian does not guarantee one's salvation.

In John 12:28-29, Jesus prays to the Father, *"Father, glorify your name..."* The Father responds with an audible voice that everyone hears. Even so, the crowd interprets the voice differently, *"The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him."* Everyone heard the same thing, a plain statement from heaven, yet everyone also heard what they wanted to hear.

No biblically literate Christian will distort Scripture, but rather take it for what it is—the Word of God that reveals who God is, what His character is like, who Jesus is, and what He commands His people to do by the grace of God through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

During the Reformation, the Church Reformers aimed to put a stop to speculative and wrong interpretations of Scripture by setting forth the principle of the analogy of faith—meaning that Scripture is its own best

interpreter. According to this rule of biblical interpretation, Christians are to interpret Scripture according to Scripture.

Scripture, according to the analogy of faith, is the supreme judge in interpreting the meaning of a particular verse, in light of the whole teaching of the Bible. Behind the idea of the analogy of faith is confi-

**“If something remains unclear in one part of the Bible, it is made clearer elsewhere in the Word of God.”**

dence in the Bible as God's consistent and coherent Word. The governing principle of the analogy of faith is to guide biblical interpretation.

*Sensus Literalis* is the principle that governs an objective interpretation of Scripture. *Sensus Literalis* means

Christians must interpret the Bible in the sense in which it is given. For example, parables are interpreted as parables, symbols as symbols, poetry as poetry, historical narratives as historical narratives, and letters as letters.

Challenging biblical passages are challenging for a reason, but they are to be interpreted in light of the clear biblical passages concerning the subject. Though all Scripture is clear enough for general interpretation, not all biblical passages are equally clear. Numerous heresies, for example, have erred on that particular point and forced conformity to the obscure passages rather than to the clear biblical passages.

As a result, these heresies have distorted the whole Bible. If something remains unclear in one part of the Bible, it is made clearer elsewhere in the Word of God. Further, let's say we have two biblical passages that can be interpreted in a variety of ways. In such an instance, we must always interpret the Bible in such a way as not to violate Scripture's unity and integrity.

The Bible is to be interpreted literally, which means the Word of

God is not to be handled as a secret codebook to unlock the world's secrets mysteries. Christians are to read the Bible like any other work of literature, for in doing so, our goal is to read the Scriptures correctly.

By reading the Bible literally, we are accounting for the intent of the biblical authors and the literary conventions of the particular style they used to address Bible readers. For example, we do not read poetry the same way we read the historical narrative of the Bible, for poetry employs rich imagery that serves as a figurative depiction of reality. The historical narrative gives an orderly account of what happened.

The goal in reading the Bible literally is to get the plain sense of the text, and thereby arrive at the meaning of the biblical passage. In inspiring the Word of God, the Holy Spirit guided the human authors to employ literary styles such as poetry, proverb, narrative, sermon, epistle, and many other styles.

While there are rules for each of these genres, we are not to violate them for the sake of allegorical readings that does not connect with the meaning of the biblical text. Reading the Bible is critical for Christians, but we are to do so according to proper hermeneutics, taking into account the various literary styles. If we fail in this, we will get the wrong meaning. The plain meaning of a passage is best for reading poetry as poetry, narrative as narrative (etc.); we will get the meaning that is controlled by the text and arrive at the proper interpretation and application of the biblical passage.

**T4L:** With your explanation of biblical interpretation in mind, and since we've covered a little on creationism versus the theory of evolution, I wanted to briefly circle back to a related subject. How does the belief that Adam was *not* a real person in real history have an impact on Christian theology and Church doctrine?

**Dave Jenkins:** I could say a lot about this, but I'll be brief on my answer to this question. Our understanding of Adam will determine our



view of gender roles since they were established pre-fall.

Further, our understanding of Adam affects our understanding of sin, the fall, salvation, marriage, church officers, and more. So, understanding the concept of Adam as a real person is what I call “determinative”, because Paul, for example, in Romans 5:12-21, says that our understanding of Adam affects our view of salvation. Paul also uses the creation of Adam as the foundational reason men are to be pastors and elders in the church (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:1-5; Titus 1:5-9) and why men lead in the home (Ephesians 5). Therefore, understanding Adam affects every facet of our Christian life and ministry.

**T4L:** So essentially, Adam affects our understanding of...well, pretty much everything. [Laughs.] A lot of people in our society consider the model of a nuclear family, with a patriarchal headship, to be outdated at best, and sexiest (and in certain extremes “toxic”) at worst. How is our understanding of gender roles and gender identity—especially with consideration to modern themes of feminism—an influence on the way we perceive and interpret Scripture?

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**“Our interpretation of the Bible is controlled by our understanding of Scripture and its authority.”**

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**Dave Jenkins:** This is a good question. A Christian’s understanding of gender roles and gender identity comes from a correct understanding of God’s Word. In answer to a previous question in this interview, I emphasized the correct interpretation and the right understanding of God’s Word. A correct understanding of God’s Word, inspired by God the Holy Spirit, will help Christians interpret the Bible rightly.

Our interpretation of the Bible is controlled by our understanding of Scripture and its authority. If a feminist comes to God’s Word think-

ing (before they even read or study the Bible) that feminism or any number of other things are right/accurate, they will be controlled by their feministic views as they handle God's Word.

When someone humbles him/herself and rightly handles the Scriptures, they are recognizing that it is given by God and therefore for their good in every area and every phase of life. This principle of interpretation regulates their handling of God's Word, which then affects how they understand gender roles and gender identity.

In summation: Gender identity is a gift of God—not something we assign for ourselves. We see this in Genesis 1-2. God created Adam and saw it was good. The Lord did not want Adam to be alone, so He took one of Adam's ribs and made Eve. God specifically assigned a gender to Adam and Eve as male and female, respectively. Our gender, whether we are a man or woman at the moment of birth, is a gift from the Lord. And as such, our gender must be carefully stewarded, just as one would care for any other gift from the Lord. Distorting our gender assaults the glory of God, who created us. This gender distortion reveals that we don't believe God created us "correctly" (or at all). Instead, by changing our gender, we reveal our lack of faith and trust in God, assaulting His glory, through which His creation of man in His likeness and image is revealed. Thus, such a view reveals a lack of faith and trust in the Lord Himself.

**"When the phrase 'love is love' is used, a person is attempting to exalt his/her own feelings over God Himself."**

**T4L:** It truly is sad that so many people have fallen prey to this lie and their own distrust in God. It's this same ideology that leads me to my next question. Many people believe in the phrase, "love is love". Why has this been harmful to the Church, and how does this philosophy contra-

dict what Scripture teaches?

**Dave Jenkins:** In 1<sup>st</sup> John 4, Scripture teaches that *God is love*. So, we can see that “God is love” is a biblical concept. With that said, when we emphasize “love” at the expense of God's justice, wrath, or holiness, the image of “God” you’re upholding is *not* the biblical God, but a false god—an idol.

This is a dangerous concept of contemporary progressive “theology”, which suggests that God is only to be known by His love. One example of the outworking of such a philosophy is the Presbyterian Church of the USA’s attempting to remove any mention of wrath from the song, “In Christ Alone”, by the Gettys. The Gettys rejected this request (and rightly so!) because they believe that the wrath of God was satisfied at the cross by Christ Himself.

When the phrase “love is love” is used, a person is attempting to exalt his/her own feelings over God Himself. Now, it needs to be said our feelings are important to the Lord. God is not disinterested in our feelings; He cares about them. There are 150 Psalms that abundantly express the whole range of human emotion.

Further, Jesus suffered intense agony and the full range of human emotions as the God-Man. Hebrews 2:17-18 and 4:14-16 tell us that what separates Jesus from sinful man is that He never sinned. It is because Christ is sinless that He is perfectly suited in every way to meet our great need for a Savior, which is what He became. He did this, Paul says in Romans 5:1-5, at just the right time, to save the ungodly. It was out of His love for us that He did this. The love of Jesus for His people is sufficient in every way.

Since Christ has bled, died, rose again, and ascended to Heaven, He is perfectly suited to love us. Jesus is wisdom personified, and as such can express Himself perfectly, whereas our sin skews our feelings. Through reading and studying God’s Word, we can learn to handle our

emotions in a God-honoring way that will help us know God's love and express it to others as Scripture teaches.

**T4L:** Okay, so as long as I'm in a heterosexual relationship, I'm okay to do whatever I want with regards to relationships with others?

**Dave Jenkins:** The way you phrased that question ("I'm okay to do whatever I want") is interesting, because the Apostle Paul would counter that point with Romans 6:1, "*May it never be!*" The Christian is doubly owned since it is the same Lord who created us that is also the One who gives us life, breath, and upholds and sustains the world. But He is also the Lord who secures every Christian. No Christian then can live however they want or do whatever they want.

As I discussed previously in answer to another question, God gives one his/her gender at birth. So, we cannot change our gender identity, nor can we ever change our natural attraction under our own power. A man is naturally attracted to a woman, and a woman is attracted to a man. When a man is attracted to a man or a woman is attracted to another woman, the Bible calls that disordered desires. Disordered desires do not align with our God-given desire of a man for a woman and a woman for a man in covenant marriage for life.

So, the answer to your question is "no". We not only cannot do whatever we want, whether that's in a heterosexual or a homosexual relationship, but a straight man or woman cannot cohabit before marriage because doing so violates the marriage covenant. It is considered adultery in the Bible. When a man and man, or a woman and woman, or a man and two women, or two women and a man, or any other number of variations "hook up", that is a violation of the God-given order. God created one man and one woman to be married for life under His authority.

It equally needs to be said that any form of sex outside of mar-

riage—whether a “casual hook-up”, pornography, pedophilia, or homosexual relations (etc.), is a sin. This is important to note because many people assume that when you talk about sexual sin, you’re not referring to anything outside of homosexuality. They may say, “Okay, I know you are against homosexual and transgender relationships”, but neglect to consider other sexual situations. To be clear, this is not about being “against” people, but rather against all types of sexual sin, because it is cosmic treason against the Lord.

Sin violates the law of God, and all sexual interactions outside of God’s definition of marriage, are sin. All sin is deserving of death and hell. But God! God saves sinners and reconciles them to Himself, through the death and resurrection of Christ. This is why we cannot do whatever we want, whenever we want. When we do, we cheapen the costly grace of Christ and our need for Him. Christ enables us to do what He commands and transforms us from children of wrath into children of God. In this way, He enables us to obey His commands for His glory.

**T4L:** My co-worker is a transgender person, who claims to be a Christian. She seems sincere in her faith, but clearly has a lot of misconceptions about what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God. How should I approach “her” with the gospel?

**Dave Jenkins:** I think I would have her define what “faith” means to her. And depending on her answer, I would start working with her from that point. Because what sincere faith means to a biblically minded Christian, and what it means to others, differs greatly.

Faith is not meant to be about me or what I think. It is what God defines and then commands because of His work of grace in our lives. Many people are under the wrong impression that because they have “faith” in something, that is saving faith. Saving faith, however, means not only that we believe in the death and resurrection of Christ, but also



that such faith is to produce a transformed life. If there is no life-change, there is likely no possession of saving faith.

What that means is salvation leads to a transformed life. If there is no transformed life, there was likely never saving faith to begin with. Beginning with what saving faith is and then seeing how the person responds can help determine if they are a Christian (although, we should always remember that only the Lord truly knows what is in the heart). The Holy Spirit will testify to this person's heart that they are a child of God. If they are a child of God, this person would need help in understanding biblical gender roles and gender identity.

As the question asks, I would begin with the image of God and biblical gender roles; after working through the questions, I would ask her about saving faith and the outward manifestation of saving faith. Then I would work on identity and whether her identity is rooted in the world or Christ. Since she claims to have saving faith but is transgender, I think this is important because a Christian has a new identity that isn't defined by what gender assignment they have. Instead, their identity is rooted in who Christ is and what He has done on their behalf.

The Bible never defines a Christian by their gender identity (transgender or cisgender, homosexual or heterosexual) but as a man or woman in need of Christ who saves and transforms. Put another way, we are not who we think we are, but we are who Christ has made us be.

I want to emphasize who we are in Christ for this reason, and in Christ, discuss what saving faith is. When ministering to a transgendered person, a good understanding of one's identity in Christ is imperative for helping the person discover who they were meant to be, and are becoming, through His Spirit.

As you are continuing to minister to any transgendered person, always pray and ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate the truth of God's Word.

**T4L:** Excellent advice, thank you! Last question: many people believe

their life's goal should be to "find oneself" and learn how to love oneself—how has this philosophy impacted the Church and what can we do to point these people in the right direction?

**Dave Jenkins:** I discussed earlier the idea of a "theology from above" versus a "theology from below", which gets to the heart of this question. A theology from below emphasizes how our feelings and emotions are on par with the importance and authority of Scripture. A theology from above emphasizes how Scripture is to regulate our feelings, and we submit our feelings to what Scripture teaches. The goal of finding oneself is the antithesis of the biblical goal of knowing Christ, who is the treasure of our hearts.

**"True happiness is found in obedience to the commands of God."**

The Christian is not against discovering who they are in Christ, as determined by Scripture. But we are against the modern notion of "discovering oneself" from a psychological and sociological perspective. The concept of discovering oneself means that we cannot know who we are apart from "discovering" our past and inner self. But since our past doesn't define us as Christians, because of Christ and His regenerative work in our lives, we reject these psychological constructs. Furthermore, Christianity is not about finding one's happiness in oneself, or discovering one's "real self", as if a person could ever do that. Modern psychology has sought to do this, but this experiment fails because people are guilt-ridden and find no true hope in such attempts. True happiness is found in obedience to the commands of God.

Psalm 16:11 says, *"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."* Notice what the Psalmist says here to answer the question

about how one finds joy. The Psalmist doesn't say we find ourselves by finding happiness in ourselves, or by discovering how "great" we are. Instead, the Psalmists says, "*You make known to me the path of life,*" which means that the Lord has specifically revealed Himself in His

**"Furthermore, we can only know the Lord and have joy in Him because He has revealed Himself."**

Word. This is the only way we can know the path of life, because God has revealed Himself in the sixty-six books of the Bible.

Since the Lord has revealed Himself in His Word, we can know joy because the joy of the Lord is our strength. Because joy—true joy—is available in Christ alone. And we can find that joy because

Christ is our High Priest, who enables us to enter into the presence of God (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Furthermore, we can only know the Lord and have joy in Him because He has revealed Himself. Therefore, we will have such joy forevermore and be satisfied because of Christ alone. This is why we don't need to discover ourselves or even love ourselves. We need to first love the Lord, by taking Him at His Word about our sin, believing what Christ (in His death and resurrection) has done to remove the punishment for our sin, and then put our sin to death each day, so we will grow to be like Christ.

**T4L:** Thank you Dave for answering our questions about your excellent new book, *The Word Matters: Defending Biblical Authority Against the Spirit of the Age*.

## The Surprising Truth About Biblical Love!

By William Farley



### **Western culture is hopelessly confused about love.**

The expression “hate crimes” is the first evidence. Hate and love are opposites. Today, hatred means disagreeing with someone about their politics or their moral stance on a subject like abortion or an LGBTQ issue. If hatred is a disagreement, then love must be agreement, a willingness to go along with others, to not stir up trouble. In other words, to be loving means to be “nice”.

We also associate love with making people feel good. The opposite is to make them feel

bad. Therefore, it is loving to supply drug addicts with needles or give

free housing and food to people even though they refuse to work. It is unloving to apply corporal discipline to children or practice church discipline. In his book, *Martin Luther and the Christian Life*, Carl Trueman sums up our contemporary confusion:

*“Love has become almost the only transcendent moral imperative in our society. Yet, we use love to justify abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and adultery. This list in itself should indicate that it has become a virtually contentless term and, like its opposite, hate, can be used to justify anything and silence all objections. The result is that Christians who wish to develop a Christian ethic need more than the word love at their disposal. Love needs content if it is to be anything more than empty sentiment.”*

The purpose of this article is to give love Christian “content”. Nothing could be more important to Christians who want to live biblically in our muddled world.

## **Love Prioritized**

At the Last Supper, Jesus made love his priority. “A new commandment I give to you,” He said, “That you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34).

Later, both John and Paul insisted that love is the one necessary virtue. It is the litmus test of our spirituality. “We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers,” writes John in his first epistle. “Whoever does not love abides in death” (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:14).

And Paul asserts in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:1-3, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”

These are strong words. No matter how much we believe, if we are not growing in love, we are still spiritually dead. And even though we exercise spiritual gifts, have great faith, and possess a Master’s of Divinity,



without love we are, spiritually speaking, a “clanging cymbal”, or worse—“nothing”.

Therefore, a growing capacity and desire to love is not optional. To do that however, we need a clear definition of biblical love.

### **Love Defined**

God’s love has three qualities. First, it is not sentimental: it is centered in action. Second, it includes affection. And third, it always loves people for God’s sake. God is the priority of biblical love.

### **Action Not Feelings**

For contemporary culture, love is sentimental and therapeutic. At its center are feelings—both mine and those of the person loved. We don’t want to feel hurt, and we don’t want others to feel hurt either, so we opt instead to disobey God to preserve our feelings and theirs. We do not confront their sin. We do not practice church discipline, and we do not separate from them when they become apostate. Because it doesn’t feel good, we will not love an enemy, and we will not forgive those who have wounded or betrayed us.

**“God’s love is always for the good of those whom He calls by His name.”**

By contrast, God’s love is not sentimental. It is displayed and measured through action, not feelings. If God’s love is a train, the engine is action, and the caboose is one’s feelings. God’s love is always for the good of those whom He calls by His name. It is sometimes necessary that His good for one person is at expense of another person. Sometimes, it’s at my expense, or your expense. In his book, *Seeing God*, Professor Gerald McDermott writes:

*“For the authors of scripture and for Jesus, love is not a feeling. It will sometimes involve feelings, but in its essence, it transcends feelings. Love is a commitment to do what is good for another.”*

Therefore, when it is in the recipient's best interest, God is willing to hurt those He loves. They may feel stress, need, or rejection, but if it furthers their spiritual growth in the long term, then it is good.

*"True love...is not simple friendliness, but a strong inclination to do good to another. It is not an emotion, but a powerful movement of the soul reflected in action, thinking and (often but not always) feelings."*

Proof that we understand the gospel is in our willingness to override our feelings and to love and forgive our enemies. That is because God loves His enemies. If He didn't, you wouldn't be saved, because you were His enemy when He died for you. Further, Jesus Himself taught that we are to love our enemies:

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-48).*

In other words, the first proof of new birth is the willingness to do something non-Christians will never do— love when it doesn't feel good. That is how the Bible defines love. It is all about action!

*"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:16).* Jesus acted. He did something, and what He did, astonishingly, He did for His enemies.

*"Once you were alienated from God," Paul writes in Colossians 1:21, "And were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior."* And he returns to this point in Ephesians 5:3 *"[We were] by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind."*

This means that Christ went to the cross for “children of wrath.” Many who profess to be Christians think Jesus died for us because He liked us, but nothing could be further from the truth. He died for his “enemies”— people for whom he felt anger, not affection. He loved his enemies with action, and He tells us to do the same.

## Affection

What about affection? Affection isn’t absent. It’s just the caboose, not the engine. God’s love includes affection. Jesus’ propitiation of His Father’s wrath is the evidence of God’s affection for us. By going to the cross, He lavished us with filial affection. And by sending Him, God the Father demonstrated His love for us, His adopted children. It's what God does for every believer.

*“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”* (Romans 8:15). If you are a Christian, God's wrath is removed. God the Father feels the deepest affection for you, and He constantly lavishes it on you, an affection that comes through an infinitely costly act of wrath-propitiating love.

## Priorities

Priorities are crucial. Only those who love God more than they love people can love people biblically. Love can be man-centered or God-centered. God-centered love prioritizes God over people. Love that is man-centered loves people more than God. Man-centered love is idolatry. Man-centered love will violate God's will to relate to others. God-centered love will suffer the rejection of others to love them as God desires.

A lawyer approached Jesus with a crucial question. *“Which is the greatest commandment?”* He asked. The answer reveals Christ’s priorities:

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first com-*

*mandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (Matthew 22:37–39).

The key to loving people biblically is keeping the first commandment first. Love God more than people. Those who do this will love people as God wants us to love them. In other words, God's Word will motivate and direct their love.

**Whether it feels good or not, whether our culture approves or not, God commands us to "lay down our lives for the brothers."**

God's love is sometimes "tough-minded", but understanding and applying it transforms marriages and parenting. It revitalizes local churches and strangles the temptation to sin (or be an enabler of someone else's sin). Putting God and God's love first results in our love becoming potent, life-giving, and transformative. "When first things [God] are put first," ob-

served C.S. Lewis, "second things [love for people] are not suppressed but increased."

God-centered love puts first things first. It loves others according to the relationship as defined by Scripture. We love our spouse differently than we love our children. We love our children differently than our employer. Love is relationally specific. Although we love all people sacrificially, God asks wives to love their husbands uniquely—by submitting to them and respecting them (Ephesians 5:22).

God asks fathers to love their children by teaching and disciplining them (Ephesians 6:4). This implies obedience to Proverbs 13:24—*"Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."* In other words, disciplining a child is a means of showing true love to him.

God tells us to love the lazy by not enabling them. *"If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat"* (2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 3:10). It is not loving to enable your 32-year-old son's laziness by allowing him to live in your

basement, if he is fully capable of working but unwilling to do so. God commands husbands to love their wives sacrificially, washing them in the Word (Ephesians 5:25). God commands us to love unrepentant church members by excommunicating them (Matthew 18:15-20). God commands us to love employers by submitting to their authority, serving them even when they are unjust (Ephesians 6:5-9). But it's important to note that when it gets bad enough, it's also OK to find a job somewhere else. This authority does not prevent employees from seeking better employment elsewhere, all while being respectful. God's Word commands us to honor our parents even when they mistreat us or disappoint us (Exodus 20:12).

## The Cross

Christ, who perfected this love, is our model. The text, "God is love", perfectly describes Him. He loved people as the Father desired, not as they desired to be loved. Feelings were not primary, they were secondary.

In the Garden, Jesus pleaded with His Father for a way around the Cross. He wanted to love us without the pain. When the Father said, "No," Jesus obeyed. He loved God more than He feared the pain. He loved us as God willed, not as He willed. His cross is the ultimate example of loving with action. "By this we know love, he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1st John 3:16).

Whether it feels good or not, whether our culture approves or not, God commands us to "lay down our lives for the brothers." This means action not feelings. Ultimately, it will include affection for those we serve. It means loving God more than we love people. In all of this, Christ's Cross is our model.

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## Moral Abortion

By David Van Bebber

**When initially given a chance to write this article, *Roe vs.***

***Wade***, the 1973 Supreme Court ruling that protected a woman's "right to privacy" under the "Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment" was yet to be overturned. While in-

ternal documents were leaked suggesting that *Roe* would be overturned, it was not until June 24, 2022, that the official pronouncement was made. This, of course, was significantly celebrated by Evangelicals throughout the United States. Albert Mohler, President of Southern Seminary, in a special edition of *The Briefing*, commenting on the ruling, noted:



*It puts a stop to the stain of legally sanctioned abortion by federal*

*mandate. It returns the question of abortion to the people and to their elective representatives. It is an answer to prayer. I cannot but think of my mother who did not live to see this day.*

Mohler was not the only public theologian to praise this massive moral victory, nor was there only praise for this reversal from Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals. Social media threads overflowed with comments that decried and praised this landmark ruling for weeks. Nevertheless, amidst all of the social media praise and the tribalism, have Evangelicals taken the time to ask if praising the reversal of *Roe* is good, moral, and ethical?

Before proceeding with the question, it is pertinent to revisit Church History on the topic of abortion. First, in recognizing God's Law as the ultimate standard and Scripture as the ultimate authority, a consistent Christ-follower will consider Genesis 9:6, "*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*" Further, a person will look to passages like Psalm 139: 13-16, Jeremiah 1:5, Exodus 20:13, or Genesis 1:27 to support the position that Christians must stand against abortion. However, this is not merely enough. Proverbs 24:11 exhorts Christians to, "*Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.*" Simply voting pro-life, praising pro-life legislation, and sending money to pro-life causes is not enough. Many have taken up the pro-life cause for this very reason.

However, for some, the argument has been over when life begins. Looking back at the January 22, 1973, ruling, the exact words of Justice Harry Blackburn were an argument for "the potentiality of human life." This "potential life" category is pure fiction from a biblical, historically Christian, and scientific perspective. Passages like Psalm 139:13-16 and Jeremiah 1:5 make it clear that life begins at fertilization. This issue of personhood is like the discussion that plagued the states building up to the Civil War, "What is a human?" Scripture, being sufficient,

makes the definition of humanity abundantly clear, and the Church has recognized this since its beginning.

Followers of Christ have always seen abortion as murder and beginning at fertilization. Francis Schaeffer writes:

*In the Pagan Roman Empire, abortion was freely practiced, but Christians took a stand against it. In 314 the council of Ancyra barred from the taking of the Lord Supper for ten years all who procured abortions or made drugs to further abortions. Previously the Senate of Elvira (305-306) had specified excommunication till the deathbed for these offences.*

Other Church Historians have noted that early Christians would scour the streets of Rome and various other cities at night to save the babies pagan Romans set out on their doorsteps to be eaten by wild dogs.

*“This was the ancient equivalent of Planned Parenthood.”* Consistent Christians have always valued the sacred nature of human life.

When *Roe* was being debated, and after it was decided, Christians failed to respond to this “iniquitous decree” in a biblically faithful and consistent manner. For instance, the Southern Baptist Convention in 1971 approved a resolution that stated:

*Be it further RESOLVED, that we call upon Southern Baptists to work for legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother*

**“Why not celebrate the overturn of *Roe*? First, Christians lied to themselves at the outset of the Supreme Court ruling on *Roe* in 1973.”**

(EMPHASIS added).

Notice that the Southern Baptist Convention early on affirmed abortion in the cases of rape, incest, fetal deformity, and “damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother.” In other words, the largest Protestant denomination affirmed that it was permissible for a woman to kill her baby, but at the same time argued they held “*a high view of the sanctity of human life, including fetal life.*” These are two contradictory positions. A person or a denomination cannot affirm that they have “*a high view of the sanctity of human life*” in one breath and then affirm the regulation of murder in the next.

In the years that passed, the SBC worked somewhat to reconcile their contradictory position. They passed resolutions condemning Partial-Birth Abortion, a resolution condemning abortion pills, a resolution calling abortion infanticide, and even a resolution correcting the mistakes of the initial 1971 resolution. However, there was always an inconsistency deeply embedded in these resolutions and other statements. One might ask, “What is that inconsistency? These seem like perfectly Christian and pro-life affirmations.” Therein lies the problem of both the historical position of the secular pro-life movement and the ethical dilemma facing Evangelicals celebrating *Roe's* overturn.

So, what is this ethical and moral problem? Why not celebrate the overturn of *Roe*? First, Christians lied to themselves at the outset of the Supreme Court ruling on *Roe* in 1973. How? Christians know that God’s Law is the ultimate standard. Yet, Christians pretended that man’s law was the paradigm by which one is to operate; they accepted the Supreme Court’s ruling. This not only undercuts the Law of God, but demonstrates a lack of commitment to God’s righteous decrees. *Roe* was never the law of the land; judges do not make laws. As *Free the States* notes:

*The pro-life political strategy for nearly five decades has been to compromise by regulating abortion within the confines of Roe v. Wade (1973) and Planned Parenthood v. Casey (1992) with the hope*

*that these decisions will one day be overturned, and more regulations will progressively be allowed by the courts.*

In other words, for the last five decades, Christians have not operated under the clear teaching of Scripture on the sanctity of life. While championing the pro-life position, pro-life Christians have merely tipped their hat to the concept that they are for life. Pro-life Christians affirm, *“All people are called to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.”* Yet, these same people have not fought for the end of abortion; they have only fought to regulate murder.

Pro-life laws have only regulated the murder of Christians' pre-born neighbors. *“Regulating abortion gives more than tactic permission [for murder]; it definitionally governs, directs, and controls the killing of preborn children through rule and law.”*

If one were to exchange the tactics of the secular pro-life movement regarding abortion and apply those same standards to rape or pedophilia, the problems would be glaring. Imagine if a law stated, “Rape can be conducted only in certain locations that are sterilized and on individuals of a certain age.” But this is what the pro-life movement's laws have done with abortion. This is not loving preborn neighbors as ourselves.

Further, states like Missouri have declared they are “abortion free.” This is a lie of the secular pro-life movement. Further investigation demonstrates that all Missouri has done is regulate murder once again. Why would one make such an assertion? Well, this is more than an assertion.

What does Missouri’s “trigger law” do? Here is what it does. It legalized the murder of any child before eight weeks of age. It allows minors to murder their baby with parental consent. The law allows “physicians” to give women pills to murder their babies as long as they are under eight weeks of age. In Missouri, private health insurance can legally cover the murder of children less than eight weeks old. Finally, if a fa-



cility passes all of the medical requirements granted by the state, the facility is permitted to murder babies under eight weeks old.

A Christian, affirming that life begins at fertilization and affirming this life is of equal value to a fully developed human, should be appalled at this legislation. No consistent Christian would be praising this legalization of murder. Yet, this is precisely what has been done. Further, there are no laws protecting a preborn child taken from Missouri to a state such as Illinois, California, New York, or any other state that allows a parent to murder a child later than eight weeks old.

Likewise, the *Guttmacher Institute* reported for the first time in 2021, “that 20 years after its introduction, medication abortion accounted for more than half of all abortions in the United States.” In other words, most abortions reported in the US are now carried out in pill form. This is without counting states like California that do not even report abortion numbers any longer. While numerous states continue to praise the success of their pro-life laws, states such as Oklahoma, one of the strictest pro-life states, has seen a 103% rise in abortions from 2017 to 2020. While the pro-life movement continues to claim victories, the reality is that the murder of the preborn has merely moved from the clinic to the couch.

So, what can be done? First, Christians must recognize that pro-life laws violate God's standard. Pro-life policies fail to call for the immediate abolition of abortion; they merely regulate murder. Next, Christians must repent for the moral evil that has taken place in our land, where we have only codified murder by enacting policies such as those in Missouri and lied by claiming to have made abortion illegal. Further, Christians must quit allowing the secular pro-life lobby to pull the wool over our eyes. As recently as June of this year, over seventy pro-life groups signed an open letter opposing the Abolition of Abortion in Louisiana Act (HB813), the first bill to call for the immediate abolition of abortion and equal protection under the law for the preborn.

Christians have consistently held that human life is sacred as all human beings at all stages of life are made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). Murder is a sin that violates God's Law. However, there is forgiveness from sin and reconciliation through the redemptive work of Christ. Even those who have murdered their babies can be forgiven. Every Christian would agree with that statement. But what about the Christians who have advocated for laws that have legalized murder? They, too, can be forgiven.

**Charles Colson, a staunch advocate for life, once noted, “*The face of evil is frighteningly ordinary.*”**

It is indeed. While lives have been saved through the secular-pro-life movement, the laws that Christians have come to fight for are not morally or ethically in line with God's standard of justice. These laws have become “frighteningly ordinary” to the pro-life Christian. God's Word speaks clearly to laws that do not uphold righteous standards stating, “Abstain from every form of evil.” Abortion is evil. Abortion is murder. Codifying murder is evil. Any law that legalizes murder is a law that Christians should reject.

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## The Sufficiency of Scripture and Christian Ethics

By Dave Jenkins

**Christian ethics is that realm of Christian theology that concerns itself with taking the truth of Scripture and applying it to the Christian life.**

The sufficiency of Scripture concerns itself with the faith and practice of Christians and how they utilize the Scripture in every phase and stage of life. Christian ethics and the sufficiency of Scripture are not divorced from each other but united at the hip; how we do Christian ethics matters because it is fueled by our understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture.



### Christian Ethics, Mental Health, and the Abortion Discussion

A lady goes up to her Pastor and asks him about abortion, and the Pastor lets her know that having an abortion is murder. That is a good

answer, and the Pastor explains what Scripture teaches and then talks about life in the womb—another good answer. But an even better answer would be to also emphasize the importance of the mother's life and the baby's life. We need to focus on the baby and the mother in contemporary Christian ethics. Both are equally made in the image and likeness of God. Both need the rescue God provides through the person and work of Jesus.

We could similarly consider how we treat the elderly. It isn't only that we ought to treat the elderly with honor and respect, but we also focus on how their care is received and given. It is good that today there is a great emphasis on mental health and the elder care, but as a society we fail in providing sufficient care for our veterans.

Since 2012, I've had a close and personal view of how veterans are treated in this country. My father is a Retired LT. Colonel in the United States Army. While he is treated well and has decent care, I've also witnessed failures in the system. Now that restrictions have been lifted, my dad has been able to see his doctors in person. However, in the 18 months prior to everything reopening, he hadn't been able to see his VA psychologist in person because they weren't allowing it due to COVID-19 lockdowns and regulations.

I am not getting into the whole COVID-19 situation in this article. I am merely using this as one example to illustrate that, in our approach to Christian ethics, we must view the whole person as made in the image and likeness of God, and in need of the rescue that only God can provide through the person and work of Christ.

## **The Danger of a Cookie-Cutter Approach to Christian Ethics**

The Church needs to avoid taking—what I call—a cookie-cutter approach to these types of situations. In Christian ethics, a cookie-cutter approach to discipleship reveals our view of the sufficiency of



Scripture, which is low, at best, and is being undermined in our approach to Christian ethics, at worst. When we view the elderly as a *problem* to be fixed (or in some instances, avoided completely), we undermine the intent of the Titus 2 ministry, where older men instruct young

men and older women instruct

younger women. In other words, we dismantle the very nature of inter-generational discipleship, which results in undercutting the transfer of the gospel from one generation to another.

**“As R.C. Sproul once remarked, the issue is whether we are good or bad theologians.”**

Our approach to Christian ethics and the hard questions we face in the coming days, ranging from issues related to abortion to the care of the elderly, must be informed by

Scripture. When our understanding of Christian ethics is shaped by Scripture, it must, by extension, be shaped by a view toward the whole person and not just one aspect of life. Jesus made it clear in the Great Commandment that we are to love the Lord with all we are and our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). That means we are to love Him, and such a love fuels a love for others.

The sufficiency of Scripture is vital to understand. The Scriptures are sufficient for the faith and practice of God’s people in every aspect and phase of life. At the street level, you can say that the sufficiency of Scripture is enough for you—period; and it answers your questions. To put it another way, Scripture helps us know not only why and how to answer questions, but also how those answers affect our own lives and the lives of others.

## **The Work and Concern of Christian Ethics**

Christian ethics is concerned with taking the Word and the best of

the theological disciplines and applying those answers to the lives of real people. The sufficiency of Scripture intersects with this concern for every phase and aspect of life. Therefore, we can say that our understanding of Christian ethics and our view of the sufficiency of Scripture matters because they both are fueled by and concerned with the *Imago Deo* and God's grace.

Christians can be confident in satisfactory answers from Scripture, whether on issues related to the care of the elderly or, even more challenging, the issue of abortion. We should not be afraid to enter the public square, proclaim what Scripture says, and engage what others are saying in the public square—whether they are Christians or not.

**No one is neutral. Everyone is a theologian.** As R.C. Sproul once remarked, the issue is whether we are good or bad theologians. So, everyone from atheists to Muslims and everywhere in-between is doing theology. As Christians, we have an objective revelation in God's Word that addresses the whole person—from sin to salvation—to the end of our lives and into eternity. God has not left us without answers to engage the issues of society. So, as we engage in the public square, may you and I, as Christians, faithfully and fearlessly proclaim the truth from Scripture, and trust the Holy Spirit to open eyes and ears to the truth of Scripture.

## The Ethics of Transhumanism

By Jacob Tanner



### **Transhumanism is likely not what you think it is.**

Many confuse it with transsexualism, a strange sexual deviancy that, only a few years ago, was considered obscure and foreign. Anyone who thought they were born the wrong gender, or who desired to change their gender, was often considered mentally ill and, on occasion, diagnosed with gender dysphoria. But while transhumanism is somewhat related to the idea of desiring to change one's gender, it goes far beyond physical gender characteristics. Transhumanism encompasses *all* body modifications a person may desire to execute.

As the penultimate part of God's symphonic creative act, humanity stands as the crescendo. Biblical creationism affirms the specific

and special *telos* of mankind, created in the image of God to reflect the resplendent glory of God. Yet, modern systems, such as posthumanism and transhumanism, deny this marvelous and beautiful truth. For both post and transhumanism philosophers, humanity is not special or designed by God, but is only a cosmic accident of sorts, needing to be both annihilated and then recreated by any means necessary. The goals of these two humanistic views are “transcendence” apart from God, and for humanity to be remade in the image of the machine. The worldviews of posthumanism and transhumanism are demonstrably wicked and antithetical to the Christian worldview represented by Scripture. Thus, Christians must guard against such philosophies and soundly reject them.

The advocates of these views are searching for transcendence apart from God. The similarities between mankind’s sin in the Garden of Eden and at the Tower of Babel are worth exploring.

### **What is a Man?**

Posthumanism and transhumanism are relatively new systems of thought, which have grown exponentially over the past few decades. Though sometimes confused, the two are not the same. Michael Plato, Professor of History and Christian Thought, provides a detailed definition of posthumanism:

*“At its core, posthumanism is a rejection of the humanist tradition in the West of human exceptionalism (the notion that humans are unique in the world) and human instrumentalism (that humans have the right to control and dominate the natural world).”*

For the post-humanist, a man is little more than another animal, and if he is exceptional in anything at all, it is the destructive force he has wrought on the earth. More alarming is what Plato describes as the way of posthumanism:

*“[It] seeks to place humans in a much closer networked relation with both machines and nature...through technological means, such as*

*‘wiring’ human brains directly to computer systems or grafting body parts from other animal species onto human bodies, a process called xenotransplantation.”*

Further, Plato also provides a helpful definition for transhumanism, explaining:

*“It is techno-deterministic, keenly progressivist and argues that technological and biological modifications can enhance the human in its present healthy state. At its heart, the transhumanist movement has as its goal the achievement of immortality by entirely human means... [They] regularly invoke transcendent language, talking of immortality, the spiritual capacities of technology, and humans becoming “god-like.””*

With those definitions provided, it becomes clear that both posthumanism and transhumanism are different sides of the same coin. Posthumanism views man in a negative light, as the scourge of the earth who needs to be either destroyed or improved upon in some fashion, and transhumanism views man as all-wise, all-intelligent, and able to reach god-like, transcendent status through technology; each seeks to remake man in order to transcend his current reality.

The biblical view of man, of course, greatly contradicts both the post-humanist and transhumanist views. The very opening chapter of Scripture shows that the true God creates mankind in His own image. After the act of creation, God then gives man a purpose and mission to fulfill. In Genesis 1:26-28, the Word of God records:

*“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of*



*the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

As a being created by God in His own image and called to the purpose of being “fruitful”, “multiplying”, “filling the earth”, “subduing the earth”, and “having dominion” over the other creatures, it is clear that man has intelligent design and purpose that motivates his entire life. The image of God in man is an ontological reality, for even after original sin, the image remains. G.K. Beale notes, “Adam and Eve and their progeny were created to be in God’s image in order to reflect his character and glory and fill the earth with it (Genesis 1:26-28).” This is the purpose for which man is created, and it is a glorious purpose to be embraced.

**“Of course, many in the post-humanist and transhumanist movements see humanity as not as good, but as bad.”**

In both post-humanist and transhumanist thought, however, mankind is flawed in his design and intelligent design is rejected altogether, alongside Genesis 1:26-28. For example, Peter Clarke, a transhumanist, writes:

*“...transhumanism advocates for improving humanity through genetic modifications and technological augmentations...there is nothing particularly sacred about the human condition...our bodies and minds are riddled with flaws that not only can but should be fixed.”*

This is once again contrasted with the biblical account, where God sees what He has created and that He declares it to be very good (Genesis 1:31). Of course, many in the post-humanist and transhumanist movements see humanity not as good, but as bad. Christian writer and thinker Sharon James responds:

*“...rejecting the idea of our Creator God means that we reject His creation as a ‘given’ to be respected—and that we demand the right to de-construct and re-construct it as we please, to suit ourselves.”*

While Christians should certainly acknowledge that sin has marred

the image of God in man, it is sinful to think that man is inherently flawed in his design and needs improvement since God is the one who designed him.

The image of God in man as an ontological reality speaks to the truth that man is a special part of God's designed order. While secularists may disagree, man is exceptional in that he is the only part of God's creation bearing God's image, and the only part of creation to receive direct commands. Both posthumanism and transhumanism have misunderstood and refused to acknowledge what makes humanity valuable. It is, obviously, totally unethical to modify what God created as good and in His own image.

## **Pursuing Transcendence Apart from God**

Denial of man's exceptionality and the *Imago Dei* does not do away with humanity's desire to experience something akin to transcendence. All of us recognize that something is not quite right, though we struggle to identify what the problem is exactly. Having rejected the true God, man finds a worthy object to exalt and deify in himself. Things like machines are elevated to godhood, yet the desire for something greater remains.

Interestingly, in both posthumanism and transhumanism, the concept of transcendence is often expressed. The idea within both systems is that, through technology, man can and must transcend his current metaphysical reality. Futurist and inventor Ray Kurzweil writes:

*"Before the next century is over, human beings will no longer be the most intelligent or capable type of entity on the planet. Actually...The truth of that last statement depends on how we define human."*

Kurzweil at least acknowledges that terms must be defined. For him, humanity is constituted by one thing only: intelligence. In another work, he writes, "This is one aspect of the uniqueness of our species: our intelligence is just sufficiently above the critical threshold necessary for us to

scale our own ability to unrestricted heights of creative power...” Conflating this further, he states that, *“Sexuality and spirituality are two ways that we transcend our everyday physical reality.”*

For Kurzweil and many others in this camp, there appears to be a direct correlation between intellect, sexuality, technology, and spirituality; which, when used in a particular way, results in transcendent experiences. Transcendence, in these terms, is sometimes referred to as the “singularity”, a concept that includes both Artificial Intelligence surpassing mankind and mankind becoming integrated with machines in his existence. Kurzweil concludes, *“Singularity...inherently changes one’s view of life...”*

The science fiction concept of the “cyborg” as a half-human, half-machine chimera is not far off from what transhumanists desire. As sinful as such thoughts are, it’s not as simple as, “this man now wants to be a woman”. No, this is far worse still, with such concepts as, “This man now wants to be a woman and a dog and a machine, all rolled into one. And, of course, he doesn’t want to ever die.” With technology, such modifications are becoming increasingly more possible.

A desire for transcendence apart from God is witnessed in the earliest pages of Scripture and is always considered sinful. First, we see it first in Genesis 3, when the serpent tempts Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which God had explicitly forbidden. Ultimately, man and woman succumb to the temptation, eat the fruit, and sin against God because they see “the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6).

Part of man’s sin is the decision to try and act as God, thus attempting to transcend his creaturely nature. In exegeting Genesis 3, Christopher Wright notes:

*“God accepts that humans have indeed breached the Creator-creature distinction. Not that humans have now become gods but that they have chosen to act as though they were—defining and de-*

*ciding for themselves what they will regard as good and evil.”*

But man is not designed to make such decisions.

This same sort of sin is then repeated only a few chapters later, in Genesis 11, at the Tower of Babel. Here, after God has explicitly commanded man to spread out across the earth and subdue it, mankind once more rebels and decides to centralize and spread upward rather than outward by constructing a tower to reach into the Heavens (Genesis 9:1-6). In verse 6, God Himself declares that what they are doing is not good. In verse 7, God confuses their language and then graciously causes them to do what He had originally commanded, for He “dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city” (Genesis 11:8). Only that which is not created and is eternal can fulfill the role of Creator-God, and transcendence is found in Him alone.

This desire for transcendence actually points to the grand plan of God for man, once more proving the value and worth of man created in God’s own image. Theologian, Thomas Schreiner, writes:

*“[T]he image of God was not lost after Adam and Eve fell into sin, even though it was marred...full restoration of the image means that human beings come to know God (Col. 3:10), and all those who know God become righteous and holy (Eph. 4:24).”*

Sin has marred the image, and it is this marring that makes man so desperate to grasp at something higher up and even transcendent. Inherently, man recognizes there is a problem, but rather than doing what he should—namely, turn to God—he rejects the knowledge of God in favor of worshiping the creature. He does exactly what Romans 1 says mankind does: exchanging the truth of God for the lie.

But, as Schreiner continues, *“[H]uman beings are restored to the purpose for which they were made when they are ‘conformed to the image’ of God’s Son (Rom. 8:29).”* True transcendence, which is really salvation and the restoration of the image of God, is only found in the

knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, His Son.

## Reshaping Man in Machine's Image

For the post-humanist and transhumanist, the desire for transcendence is directly related to the drive to reshape man in a machine's image. Theologian Owen Strachan notes in his work *Reenchanting Humanity*:

*"The post-humanist views the merging of technology and humanity as a positive outcome toward which society is headed. Someday, human people will not be needed. Posthumanism is antihumanism and nihilistic at its core."*

Lest one believes transhumanism is the morally superior of the two, Strachan also notes that in transhumanist thought, "Salvation does not come by gracious renewal; salvation comes by genetic engineering." Both philosophical systems are seeking to reshape man

through means of technology. This is an evident wickedness.

**"This could easily lead to the same problems of Nazi Germany, when the ideals of the Aryan race were sought..."**

This reshaping of humanity is littered with ethical problems. What happens when people redesign themselves with technological advancements that others cannot afford? Human beings have always followed popular trends; what happens when certain human traits, like dark complexions,

dark hair, and dark eyes, are considered less than desirable? Will people possessing these traits be considered less than human? This could easily lead to the same problems of Nazi Germany, when the ideals of the Aryan race were sought, with the outcome of the near annihilation of the Jews, through the process of eugenics. But some of those traits that mankind views as less than desirable are actually the most glorify-



ing to God.

Christian philosopher, Vern Poythress, comments, *“If we reflect on the image of God...[t]he unity and diversity in human beings...have their ultimate foundation and archetype in the unity and diversity in God.”* In other words, diversity in ethnicity, age, gender, and physical and intellectual ability are fundamentally good for they reflect God, who is one God and yet three persons. This should not be conflated with the effects of sin, which have produced various diseases and mutations in man which can—and should—be treated by science. But diversity, at its most base level, is good.

Jesus Christ, as the only begotten Son of God and the God-man Himself, came to the earth in the form of human flesh, and yet was declared perfect. In fact, Colossians 1:15 states, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” As a man, Jesus bore God’s image perfectly. This means that the image of God in man not only still exists, but that the design of man is still good, and to deny this is sinful. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson comment on Colossians 1:15:

*“Christ has come in human flesh and accomplished what the first Adam did not; consequently, as divine and ideal human, Christ reflects the image that Adam and others should have reflected but did not.”*

Post-humanists and transhumanists can be affirmed in their belief that humanity, as it stands, is not what it is meant to be. They err, however, in believing the solution is in technology. The solution is to be conformed to Christ’s perfect image (Romans 8:29). In Christ alone is salvation, transcendence, and restoration of the image of God in man.

## **Is Human Technological Advancement Really so Sinful?**

Objections raised to the view that post-humanist and transhumanist ideas are wicked and sinful may come in the form of Nietzsche’s famous

phrase that “God is dead”, and so, in the words of Dostoevsky, “All things are lawful then, [men] can do what they like.” In other words, if the majority of these thinkers do not claim to believe in God, why should they view what they attempt to accomplish as sinful?

Scientist, Yuval Noah Harari, comments:

*“We forget that our world was created by an accidental chain of events, and that history shaped not only our technology, politics and society, but also our thoughts, fears and dreams...we seldom try to shake ourselves free, and envision alternative futures.”*

For Harari, Christian thought is harmful because it has held back science. Evolution, as chance chaos shaping humans, is “good”. Technological enhancements are merely the next step in the evolutionary process. Yet, the evolutionary process that he lauds so highly is only

**“Herein is also the obvious truth:  
that there must be inherent  
design within humanity.”**

possible without the guiding hand of intelligent beings. The evolutionary process is controlled by random events. Post-humanists and transhumanists want to aid in the evolution of man, but this is not evolution.

Herein is also the obvious truth: that there must be inherent design within humanity. Apart from design, there would be nothing to improve. Chaos

cannot be made into anything other than chaos. Thus, humanity can only be the product of an intelligent designer, thereby proving that humanity is exactly as God intends for him to be. By desiring to improve and change the biological design of mankind through technology, these worldviews actually affirm that mankind seeks the ultimate design, yet their worldview is unable to explain why this is the case.

A second objection arises from post-humanists’ and transhumanists’ desire to eliminate disease and do away with death. Christians can agree that science and medicine are beneficial to treat various ailments,

cure diseases, and slow deterioration of bodily systems. But these worldviews see death as avoidable and a mere hurdle to be overcome. Again, Harari provides a point of reference for this line of thinking when he writes that Christians “viewed death as a vital and positive part of the world. Humans died because God decreed it, and their moment of death was a sacred metaphysical experience exploding with meaning.” Taking this line of thought further, Harari continues:

*“[There is] Nothing metaphysical about [death]. It is all technical problems... And every technical problem has a technical solution. We don’t need to wait for the Second Coming in order to overcome death. A couple of geeks in a lab can do it.”*

The Christian, however, recognizes that while death is not necessary for meaning (if Adam and Eve had not sinned, death need not have entered the fray), it is clear that death has significant meaning—namely,

it stands as a judgment against sin and is part of the curse man incurred in Genesis 3.

**“Christians must continue to stand firm in the hope of Christ, rejecting every scheme of man...”**

The only cure is to have sin dealt with first. Therefore, every effort to stall death apart from Christ will fail, for Scripture states, “it is appointed for man to die once” (Hebrews 9:27). If God desires to end a life, He need only will it. The hope to reverse the curse,

defeat death, and find true significance for a meaningful life is in Jesus alone. As Hebrews 9:28 states, “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” Jesus, not technology, will alone save human beings.

## **Deus Ex Machina or Salvation in Christ Alone**

Posthumanism and transhumanism recognize that something has

gone wrong but err in what they see as wrong. For these two systems of thought, humanity needs to evolve through technology. The best hope for man is in the machine. If man can be integrated into a machine, diseases can be cured, the earth healed, and death destroyed. Ultimately, these worldviews are seeking the restoration of the image of God in man, though they do not recognize this. However, their language of conquering death, healing disease, transcending human nature, and entering godhood is thoroughly religious language. They have not done away with God; they have merely found their god in the machine. Thus, man can only be made perfect in the machine.

**The wickedness of these two schools of thought is revealed not only in their rejection of God, but also by their worship of man-made technology.** By side-stepping God to the path of transcendence, man repeats the original sin in slightly different form. Greater sin will occur as humans use technology to make themselves seemingly superior to others, thus creating a new division in the human race between those who are technologically enhanced and those who are not. Though technology can be used as a gift from God, the only true answer and hope for the restoration of the image of God in man and the transcendence of man beyond his current, sinful condition is found in Jesus Christ. Christians must continue to stand firm in the hope of Christ, rejecting every scheme of man, for apart from Him, all attempts will end disastrously.

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## Using Digital Technology to Build Faith: A Warning and an Encouragement

By Scott Hurst



**I sat with the parents of ten teenagers for a seminar about teens and digital technology.** I asked them what guidelines they give their children for their phones. The answers were all over the place. Some families had strict rules. Others

put up small fences like no phones at dinner. A big surprise was the parents who shared their digital lives with their kids. They followed each other on Instagram and even gave them access (limited) to their online banking. This group of parents all ascribed to the same statement of faith but held a wide range of convictions about how we ought to use digital technology.

Our relationship with technology is a complicated cocktail of harm and blessing. Depending on whose hand flicks the switch, nuclear power

can destroy or sustain a population. It's a complicated relationship, but similarly, we cannot walk away. Technology is part of our story. Our ability to create is a core part of being made in God's image and fulfilling His creation mandate.

In Genesis 1:28, God says to our first parents, *"Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth."* We build tools "to shape God's creation for practical purposes". The existence of technology results from God's creation. Tim Challies says, "God made us creative beings in his image and assigned to us a task that would require us to plumb the depths of that creativity."

Using technology is a consequence of creation. Using it for destructive ends, however, is a consequence of sin. That is why the question we wrestled with around the circle of parents was a question of ethics: what is the right use of digital technology? Product labels give directions and warnings. I've found those two categories helpful in thinking through questions about how to use and how not to use digital technology. So let me first offer you a word of warning and then a word of encouragement (direction).

**"Despite all the advances in technology, there is no shortcut to cultivating wisdom."**

## **Warning: Technology Cannot Create Shortcuts to Maturity**

Tony Reinke defines technology as "applied science and amplified power". One way to apply this amplified power is to make things faster. By adding online courses, I can earn a degree one year sooner. Unlike former generations, we don't have to wait for a letter in the mail. We communicate across the world in the blink of an eye. The power of digital technology speeds up many things. It's tempting then to think we

can do likewise with the speed of spiritual maturity.

Christians grow from infancy to maturity. Paul reminds the Ephesian church to build each other up *“until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness”* (Ephesians 4:13). Christians will grow. This is a fact. The frustration, however, is that this growth is often slow and requires patience.

Here is one example. Part of growing in Christ is the formation of wisdom. How do we learn wisdom? The book of Proverbs is an education in learning and applying wisdom. It is written as a father teaching his son, and a central lesson is learning patience and slowness.

- *“When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is prudent”* (Proverbs 10:19).
- *“There is one who speaks rashly, like a piercing sword; but the tongue of the wise brings healing”* (Proverbs 12:18).
- *“A patient person shows great understanding, but a quick-tempered one promotes foolishness”* (Proverbs 14:29).
- *“Do you see someone who speaks too soon? There is more hope for a fool than for him”* (Proverbs 29:20).

A wise person controls his/her tongue. Despite all the advances in technology, there is no shortcut to cultivating wisdom. How we use digital technology, such as social media apps, often cuts across the grain of wisdom. The reactionary post motivated by impulse gets more comments and likes than a delayed, but thoughtfully crafted, insight. What should be kept in notebooks or processed through conversation is now public discourse. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other platforms foster quick and constant scrolling, not slow and patient thinking. Cultivating wisdom, however, is not about speed. It requires a slowness that rows against the currents of social media.

Digital technology cannot shortcut the slowness of spiritual

growth. We don't need spiritual steroids to grow in Christ, we need what Eugene Peterson referred to as a long obedience in the same direction.

Alongside this temptation to speed up personal growth is the temptation to amplify the reach of our ministry. Streaming sermons and publishing blogs, for example, enable preachers to extend their reach across the globe. This opens up resources from all over the world to support discipleship, evangelism, missions, and leadership development in churches. That's a treasure I am glad to use. But this amplification also has its curses.

The same technology used to broadcast a ministry around the world allows us to create a product (the message) divorced from the people in front of us—those to whom we've been called to deliver the message. We look over their heads to speak to the camera. Peter reminds fellow elders that their job is to “Shepherd God's flock among you” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:2). He wasn't thinking of YouTube when he said this, but the primary temptation for Christian leaders in his time is the same as in ours.

**“Applying Paul's principle here places digital technology as tools we use to cultivate what we most value: to know Christ.”**

By enlarging our platform, we are tempted to look past our congregation. We dream about the people we want to serve instead of loving the people God has called us to serve.

This is the danger, and it's a warning I need to hear. Pastor, the congregation you serve is not a launchpad to a worldwide platform. That congregation has been bought by the blood of Christ

for the glory of God, and the Holy Spirit has placed you there as a steward to love them, equip them, and feed them. Jesus sacrificed Himself for them. Do not, in return, sacrifice them on the altar of your ambition!

As we think about the technology we use, remember the warning. Technology is not a shortcut to maturity or a springboard to success.

## Encouragement: Use Digital Tools to Support What is Valuable

How can Christians use technology well? We often learn by following examples, so let's look at the Apostle Paul for some guidance here.

Paul says to the Corinthians, *“Everything is permissible for me,’ but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me,’ but I will not be mastered by anything”* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:12). Paul can do several things, but he commits only to those that are beneficial and will not master him. Whatever distracts or becomes an obstacle for Paul in pursuing what is most valuable, he learned to live without. He applies what the author of Hebrews writes:

*“Let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”* (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Applying Paul's principle here places digital technology as tools we use to cultivate what we most value: to know Christ. You'll find similar advice outside Christian circles. In his book *Digital Minimalism*, Cal Newport says people should “see new technologies as tools to be used to support things they deeply value—not as sources of value themselves”.

Biblical wisdom shares a lane with common sense. Being wise about technology use begins with understanding what is most valuable and then using these tools to support our deepest values. For Christians, that is knowing and being known by Christ (Philippians 3:7-8). If we simply assimilate a new piece of tech into our lives without considering how to use it strategically in support of what we value, the tech takes over.

So, before jumping into a new app, service, or product, ask a few questions.

- What is the intended purpose of this app, service, product,

etc.?

- Why would I need this?
- How might this help my walk with Christ?
- How might I misuse this?
- What are potential dangers?
- What fences should I build to protect me from misuse and danger?

The tools we use and how we use them will differ from person to person. To use the tools well, though, we must be thoughtful and intentional about how they will serve the purpose of helping us know Christ.

As a personal example, I recently deleted the Facebook app from my phone. I wanted to use the app to share articles and connect with people. In reality, however, I spent most of my time on the app scrolling and watching videos, all while tuning out my family. It's always a gut punch when your son asks you to put your phone down so he can talk to you. My problem is not primarily my phone or Facebook's app, but how I use both tools. I wasn't purposeful and so I got sucked into the maelstrom of constant scrolling. This affected my attentiveness to my family and also how I used and misused much of my time.

**“Allow the people closest to you to give honest feedback about your use of tools like your phone and social media.”**

Nothing is more valuable than knowing Christ and being known by Him. Digital tools are a great asset, helping us grow deeper in Christ, but without thought and purpose, they will distract and draw us away from growing in Christ.

As a final word, let me encourage you to lean on others. Do not trust your heart or your instincts. Proverbs reminds us to *“be not wise*



*in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil*” (Proverbs 3:7).

Allow the people closest to you to give honest feedback about your use of tools like your phone and social media. *“Without guidance, a people will fall, but with many counselors there is deliverance”* (Proverbs 11:14). God, in His wisdom, has put certain people around you. Trust His wisdom and lean on their counsel.

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## The Ethics of Critical Race Theory

By Jacob Tanner

**Critical Race Theory (CRT) are three words that many of those reading this article were likely not aware of until around 2020.** Though this “theory” has undoubtedly gained widespread acclaim and attention since the death of George Floyd for a number of reasons, it is not new. Some of those reading this are, perhaps, unsure about it. Some, perhaps, see some good things in CRT. But, likely, no one agrees with everything that Critical Race Theory has to say. Still, for the Christian, perhaps the



most important question to ask is this: Is CRT an ethical and biblical solution to the injustices in the world?

My goal with this article is to explain Critical Theory broadly and Critical Race Theory specifically in such a way that every reader will understand, show its unethical nature, and then explain a better alternative.

## **More Than Politics: The Plight of an Unethical Worldview**

First, let me make a couple of things clear: Critical Race Theory is not *really* a political issue, but a worldview issue. It matters not if the reader is a Republican or Democrat because either can hold to the basic tenets of CRT. It is, after all, a worldview—a lens through which we view the world around us.

Those who view the world through the lens of Critical Theory, and Critical Race Theory in particular, will see the world only in terms of gender, sexual orientation, and skin color and, regrettably, will view others in ultimately racist ways.

This is highly problematic for the believer in Christ. Before we are anything else, we are identified as belonging to Christ. We are, fundamentally, Christians, and the Christian worldview is constructed through the lens of Scripture. Thus, we believe 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 10:3-6 to be true: *“For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.”* In light of our understand of this, we recognize that because CRT is antithetical to Scripture and the basic Christian worldview, and therefore it must be torn down and combatted with Scripture.

Now, it is at this point that some reading may begin to offer objections. They may say, "Scripture will do us no good here. The New Testament has had 2,000 years and the Old Testament even longer to put a dent into racial injustices. We need CRT working alongside Scripture because there are very racist 'Christians' whose aim is to suppress minority groups." I would respond to such hypotheticals that it has only been Scripture that has ever helped to combat any injustices, and only those Christians who have been faithful to Scripture have been effective in this work. Of course, not everyone that calls themselves a *Christian* is really a Christian. Many just use the title. But there has never been a genuine Christian who was racist. Christ alone cures racism because Christ alone defeats sin.

Others, in an effort to build up and then destroy a strawman, might feel compelled to argue that Christians are simply afraid of critical thinking. Perhaps, as many have suggested, Christians are afraid of having to think about different ethnicities or cultures or religions because they are afraid of being converted to something other than Christianity. Perhaps their faith is weaker in Christ than they let on.

This is all a strawman attack. Christians are not afraid of any of these things, nor are they afraid of future generations being confronted with these things. In fact, Christians like myself have personally made it a point to study various religions and cults. We have read through works of various philosophers from all over the world, and have even read authors as varied as Nietzsche, Hitler, Marx, and Darwin. I, personally, actively encourage others to do the same. All Christians who are engaged in missions work in various parts of the world have been confronted with the need to learn about other cultures in order to effectively minister in other places.

These studies are all good things. I, personally, have no problem with them and encourage them. I even think people should read and learn about CRT.

Another objection may come in the form of chronological snobbery; in other words, the proponent of CRT will attack the Christians of the past and will praise modern secular man as standing on the right side of history. “If,” they may say, “You desire to stand on the right side of history, then adopt the tenets of Critical race theory.” However, anyone who cares at all for history will know that following the tenets of CRT will only end with the burning of the books, as in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*. The 1619 Project is a prime example of this: rather than acknowledge the founding of America as 1776, when the Declaration of Independence was signed, certain proponents desire to reset America’s founding to 1619, when the first African slaves were brought to the New World. By doing so, they can insist that America, as a nation and institution, is institutionally racist and was founded on racist principles. The end goal is nothing less than the total upheaval of American history, Western history, and the destruction of all American laws, principles, and documents as they have long been known.

No Christian is opposed to genuine history being taught. History should and must be taught. Children need to learn about slavery in the US, segregation, and the Jim Crow laws that made racialized segregation legal. These things were wrong, and we must learn from our history. The problem is not with the teaching of history, but the teaching of history with an agenda to program how people think. Indeed, all of history must be taught without an agenda attempting to tell our children how to think; it must be taught as a resuscitation of factual events and people. It is the responsibility of the family, and not societal institutions, to teach morality. CRT attempts to rewrite history in its own image, but the Christian simply cannot allow this to happen.

Finally, one may argue that the only way every person will be truly free from minority statuses is if we all learn to adopt CRT into our worldview. After all, CRT adopts ideas from Intersectionality, which in turn allows it to pinpoint and elevate those who hold to minority statuses—for example, the transgender black “woman” is recognized as an ex-

treme minority and elevates them far above all others, giving them more of a voice than others. But this is fundamentally racist to its core and, more than this, conflates and/or elevates sexuality with/to skin tone and ethnicity. CRT cannot free people from minority statuses. Only Christianity can recognize mankind as being created equal before God, and it is every Christian's duty to fight for liberty.

With these objections dealt with, it is important to remember that famous speech of Martin Luther King Jr. (his own moral failures notwithstanding), who said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." All who fight for this same dream must reject CRT. King Jr. fought for a day when people would be judged for the content of their character rather than the color of their skin; CRT does not. CRT does the *opposite*. It desires to view everything through a racist lens, so that people are not judged based on the content of their character, but by the color of their skin. For that reason, we must reject and utilize a better alternative in the fight against racism and, ultimately, sin.

## **Defining the Worldview**

So, with that said, what exactly is CRT? A helpful definition of Critical Race Theory comes from the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs: *Critical Race Theory was developed out of legal scholarship. It provides a critical analysis of race and racism from a legal point of view. Since its inception within legal scholarship CRT has spread to many disciplines. CRT has basic tenets that guide its framework. These tenets are interdisciplinary and can be approached from different branches of learning. CRT recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society. The individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture. This is the analytical lens that CRT uses in examining existing power structures. CRT identifies that these power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which*



*perpetuates the marginalization of people of color. CRT also rejects the traditions of liberalism and meritocracy. Legal discourse says that the law is neutral and colorblind, however, CRT challenges this legal “truth” by examining liberalism and meritocracy as a vehicle for self-interest, power, and privilege. CRT also recognizes that liberalism and meritocracy are often stories heard from those with wealth, power, and privilege. These stories paint a false picture of meritocracy; everyone who works hard can attain wealth, power, and privilege while ignoring the systemic inequalities that institutional racism provides.*

Let it be noted that CRT began as a *law theory*. It argued, firstly, that the laws of the United States of America were institutionally racist. That is to say, all founding fathers and all founding documents are racist: the Constitution of the United States is racist, laws are racist, Civil order is racist. And, because of this, the only result can be that all those who are leaders and law officials must also be racist. There is no escape from racism when a country is considered institutionally racist.

If an even clearer definition of CRT is desired, then one need only to read the entry on CRT from *The Encyclopedia Britannica*. It states, “*Racial inequality emerges from the social, economic, and legal differences that white people create between “races” to maintain elite white interests in labour markets and politics, giving rise to poverty and criminality in many minority communities.*”

This definition should raise some flags and ring some bells. If it sounds familiar to you, it’s because this is an old system that has been rebranded. The old system went by the name *Marxism*.

Marxism is the belief that there are two types of people in the world: the oppressed and the oppressors. Those of you who remember learning about it will recall that Karl Marx’s dream was a socialist utopia. The idea behind it was this: The working class (proletariat) is oppressed by the upper-class (bourgeoisie). The rich get richer because the poor get poorer. So, Marx’s utopian ideal was that the oppressors would themselves become oppressed by those they were oppressing. After this,

wealth would be redistributed as needed, per family. All would work as he or she was able and would receive only as much as needed. Once everyone had only what they needed, with no ability to rise above their economic needs, and with no possibility of falling below, then the police could be defunded because Marx believed there'd be no reason for anyone to commit crime. Finally, all that would be left was the State's redistribution wealth.

Marxism was originally an economic system, but it easily led to Communism and Socialism, and ultimately (utterly) failed. Look to countries like Russia (Venezuela, etc.) and you will find that Communism doesn't work. Look to modern-day China and you will find that Marxist-Communitic-Capitalism may bring wealth to a nation, but the people will be crippled beneath a totalitarian regime.

### **Enter Cultural Marxism**

What CRT has ultimately done is embrace Marxist principles and apply them to matters of race, sexual orientation, gender, and a number of other things. In CRT, the oppressors are the "whites" and the oppressed are the people of color. But it can go deeper: the oppressors are the "straight, white males" and the oppressed are all those who are not straight, white males. Just like in Marxism, CRT believes those white oppressors need to be overthrown.

This is an extended quote, but I think that this really paints the picture to understand CRT. Douglas Murray, who is a homosexual, writes about much of this in his book, *The Madness of Crowds*. He actually rejects Critical Theory and dismisses it as demonstrably wicked and destructive, despite not holding to a Christian worldview. How much more ought Christians to reject CRT. Murray writes:

*"In 1911 a famous poster appeared, entitled 'Industrial Workers of the World,' depicting what it claimed to be the 'Pyramid of the Capitalist System.' At the bottom of the Pyramid where the brave men, women and children of the working class. With their proud, sturdy yet struggling shoulders they were holding up the entire edifice. 'We work for all' and 'We feed all' were the captions accompanying this*

*lowest but most fundamental part of the system. A floor above them, wining and dining in black tie and evening dresses, were the well-off capitalist classes, supported by the workers and only able to enjoy themselves because of the labor of working men. 'We eat for you' said this tier. Above them were the military ('We shoot at you'). Above them the clergy ('We fool you'). Above them the monarch ('We rule you'). And finally, perched at the very top of the Pyramid, even above the monarch, was a great big bag of money with dollar signs on the outside. 'Capitalism' was the label for the highest tier of the state.*

*Today a version of this old image has made its way to the center of the social justice ideology. Just one of the things that suggests the Marxist foundations of this new structure is the fact that capitalism is still at the top of the Pyramid of oppression and exploitation. But the other top tiers of this hierarchy Pyramid are inhabited by different types of people. At the top of the hierarchy are people who are white, male and heterosexual. They do not need to be rich, but matters are made worse if they are. Beneath these tyrannical male overlords are the minorities, most noticeably the gays, anyone who isn't white, people who are women and also people who are trans. These individuals are kept down, oppressed, sidelined and otherwise made insignificant by the white patriarchal, heterosexual, cis system. Just as Marxism was meant to free the laborer and share the wealth around, so in this new version of an old claim, the power of the patriarchal, white males must be taken away and shared around more fairly with the relevant minority groups.*

*At its outset this new ideology was not taken especially seriously by its opponents. Some of its claims seemed so laughable, and its inherent contradictions so clear, that coherent criticism was almost absent. This was a mistake. It is an ideology with very clear ideological precursors, but still an ideology that - whatever else may be said for it - provides a lens for understanding the world and a purpose for an individual's actions and life within the world."*

We must not make the same mistakes any longer. We must take CRT seriously. Its aim is more than the overthrow of the American infrastructure, capitalism, and Western history. It aims at nothing less than the total eradication of the West. So, since knowledge is one of our great tools, let us now ask the following: how does CRT go about distinguishing between the oppressor and oppressed groups today?

## Intersectionality

Intersectionality is best thought of as a graph where a person has defining characteristics that overlap with one another. So, a black person would follow a line until they overlapped with something else. Let's assume they're an atheist. So, now, the fact that they are black and an atheist has caused an intersection. But let's say they're also transgender. The intersection is that they are a black, atheistic, and transgender.

The one who made intersectionality so popular was a woman named Kimberle Crenshaw, who was working in Critical Law Theory. Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay (who are a liberal, feminist scholar and atheist, respectively), write in their book *Cynical Theories*:

*“Intersectionality began as a heuristic - a tool that lets someone discover something for themselves - but has long been treated as a Theory and is now described by Crenshaw as a practice. Crenshaw first introduced the idea of intersectionality in a polemical 1989 scholarly law paper called “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Anti-Racist Policies.” There, she examines three legal discrimination cases and uses the metaphor of a roadway intersection to examine the ways in which different forms of prejudice can “hit” an individual with two or more marginalized identities. She argues that - just as someone standing in the intersection of two streets could get hit by a car coming from any direction or even more by more than one at a time - so a marginalized person could be una-*

*ble to tell which of their identities is being discriminated against in any given instance. Crenshaw argues persuasively that legislation to prevent discrimination on the grounds of race or gender is insufficient to deal with this problem or with the fact that a black woman, for instance, might experience unique forms of discrimination that neither white women nor black men face...*

*Intersectionality was more fully articulated two years later, in Crenshaw's highly influential 1991 essay, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color", and she defines intersectionality as a 'provisional concept linking contemporary politics with postmodern theory.'*"

Notice how this language is imbued with the idea of narrative and experience. This is because Critical Race Theory rejects objective, concrete truth in favor of subjective experiences. But it needs to ground the meaning of life in something, right? Therefore, it does this through propagating the idea of the expressive individual—individuals must express themselves fully according to intersectionality, and this is where identity politics come into the picture.

Carl Trueman, in his book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, wrote about this very thing:

*"The world in which we live is increasingly dominated by psychological categories. Indeed, the big political questions of our time are those of identity, and modern identities have a distinctly psychological aspect... Philip Reiff described the dominant understanding of the self of this present age as that of the psychological man, the successor to the political man, religious man, and economic man of previous eras. Charles Taylor, too, sees the expressive individual as the now normative type of self in our society and as the basic presupposition of much of what happens in our world, from attitudes toward the sexual revolution to judgment in law courts and protests on campuses. Yet psychological man and expressive individualism did not emerge in the 20th century from a vacuum, nor were they self-*

*caused. Like all historical phenomena, they have a genealogy, a story that stretches back in time and makes their emergence and their cultural dominance comprehensible.”*

Expressive individualism makes intersectionality possible. Only the Christian can combat this, for it is only the Christian whose identity is now fully in Christ, and who lives to see Christ’s will accomplished.

## **Critical Race Theory in Action**

Perhaps the greatest danger of CRT is seen by looking at Black Lives Matter. Founded by Alicia Garza, who proudly calls herself a “trained Marxist”, one of the original goals on the Black Lives Matter website was:

*“We are self-reflexive and do the work required to dismantle cis-gender privilege and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence... We foster a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking, or rather, the belief that all in the world are heterosexual (unless s/he or they disclose otherwise) ... We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and ‘villages’ that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable.”*

The fact that fathers are missing in this statement is a purposeful attack against men and the patriarchy.

Clearly, CRT is about more than just racism—it is about the society, the culture, and the nation itself. Is not only about race, but anything that may identify an individual and its ultimate aim is to destroy any and all traditional values. Those who do not get on board are threatened with being “cancelled”, fired from their jobs, losing out on promotions, losing out on scholarships, losing out on opportunities, or by oth-



er means humiliated. In short, CRT makes *everything* racist and there is no forgiveness to be found. Therefore, all that's left is for the white, straight, Christian male to start making reparations eternally. Critical Race Theory has effectively made racism the new original sin, but it has left behind a "savior".

## Winning the Worldview War

Fighting the worldview war may not be easy, but it is worth it. The Christian must reject Critical Race Theory as the unethical, antichrist nonsense it is. Rod Dreher, in *Live Not By Lies*, explains:

*"What is harder for contemporary people to appreciate is how we are repeating the Marxist habit of falsifying language, hollowing out familiar words and replacing them with a new, highly ideological meaning. Propaganda not only changes the way we think about politics and contemporary life but it also conditions what a culture judges worth remembering.*

*I mentioned the way liberals today deploy neutral sounding, or even positive, words like dialogue and tolerance to disarm and ultimately defeat unaware conservatives. And they imbue other words and phrases—hierarchy, for example, or traditional family—with negative connotations."*

We must live our beliefs. Anything less than this, and the result will be what we have already noted. Not only do the words we use matter, but the way we live matters. We must proclaim truth, live by truth, and recognize that all truth must be grounded in God's Word. Reject lies and refuse to live by them.

Living by the truth necessitates a total rejection of all that CRT teaches. There can be no wiggle room or compromise. Voddie Baucham, in his book, *Fault Lines*, states: *"We are right to pursue Justice, peace, and unity (Micah 6:8; Romans 12:18; John 17:20-21). That is not the fault line. The fault lies in believing that such a vision can be attained by affiliating with, using the terminology of, or doing anything other than oppos-*

ing in the most forceful terms the ideology that lies at the root of the social Justice movement.” It is our duty to reject all language that is not biblical and wise.

## **Fighting Unethical Tools with the Ethics of Truth**

Allow me to expressly say this: I believe racism exists. I believe that we, especially Christians, must fight against racism. I do not believe that CRT offers a valid way of doing so; I believe that CRT is destructive. I also believe that the primary problem we face is not racism, but a *sin nature*. And the only thing that can cure our sin problem is the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider the truth of Ephesians 2:11-22:

*“Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*

CRT creates racial hostility and sin. Christ cures racial hostility. Cultural Marxism denies Christian Laws, but Christianity upholds God's Laws. It is only through Christ that racism is cured. It is only through Christ that the unethical nature of CRT is defeated.

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## Are Wokeness, CRT, DEI, and Intersectionality Biblical or Biblically Unethical?

By Kelly Benware

**Does it seem to you that you woke up one morning and overnight the world had turned upside down?**

Definitions of life and its most basic elements had

changed and continued to evolve. Truth became a depository for personal opinion, and some truths are negotiable, relative, or discarded because they are despised. After years of working in leadership positions with several ministries, I found myself constantly asking, “Is Christ enough in a woke ‘Christian’ environment?”



I was perplexed. The ministerial leaders surrounding me did not seem concerned. God was being replaced with the idol of diversity. So, I started asking questions about Critical Race Theory (CRT), intersectionality, wokeness, Diversity-Equality-Inclusion (DEI) programs, and other issues surrounding race, racism, oppression, and the proper biblical response.

Critical Race Theory is one of many subsets that fall under Critical Theory. Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay write in *Cynical Theories*, “Critical Race Theory holds that race is a social construct that was created to maintain white privilege and white supremacy.”

For context, “Theorists” are secular sources that promote Critical Theory and/or its subsets. It encompasses a much larger conversation than race. Subsets can include Critical Social Justice (CSJ), Critical Gender Theory (CGT), as well as CRT, and many other categories. Intersectionality is a legal tool that has been adopted by many Theory subsets and is now used to categorize the degree to which a person has experienced oppression based upon aspects of his or her identity.

Wokeness is best described by Owen Strachan of his book *Christianity and Wokeness*:

*“What is wokeness? Wokeness is, as we have noted, a mindset, a mood, and a set of principles and beliefs. It takes different forms; CRT is woke, intersectionality is woke and belief systems that make use of the concepts and framework of these ideologies are woke, whether wittingly or unwittingly.”*

The formal subset of CRT was founded in the 1970s, but terms and ideologies have been evolving since then. Diversity-Equality-Inclusivity programs began over the past ten-to-thirty years with a foothold in the legal and academic spheres. DEI programs have slowly extended into other fields, institutions, and the workplace. We’ll start with the question: Do DEI principles align with Scripture? If not, why not?

## Diversity is Biblical

The Bible speaks of diverse people groups and establishes that God made each person uniquely. His Word refers to differing ethnic groups and nations, but it never groups people of one skin color into race, which is a more recent social construct created by humans to identify people groups by physical characteristics and skin color. If diversity instruction is based upon the unbiblical but broadly accepted concept of race, believers run into the problem of discussing diversity using concepts not found in Scripture.

Of course, “race” cannot be ignored as it is a word and concept used by society. Christians must be able to navigate the conversation of race and diversity. However, in a conversation on diversity, it is important to note that “race” is not a biblical label. In “Christian woke” circles, biblical concern for justice and alleviating oppression is ascribed to these artificially constructed groups of people, who happen to be a certain skin color or those that culture defines as oppressed. But Scripture makes no correlation between those identified as oppressed and those categorized according to skin color or physical traits. In fact, Scripture never says that all “persons of color” are oppressed or that all whites are privileged.

**“If whites live in a permanently irredeemable state, then it makes sense for theorists/activists to preach works for the alleviation of wrongdoing (sin).”**

On the contrary, Ephesians 2:15-16 says, *“His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two [referring to the ethnic groups of Jews and Gentiles], thus making peace, and in one body...”*

We are told that America has always viewed persons of color as lesser human beings and whites as better. It is taught as a fact that this distinction has automatically placed burdens upon all minorities while



assessing certain privileges to whites that alleviate the demands of life.

Robin DiAngelo's book, *White Fragility*, is a standard resource in the canon of CRT, DEI, and Intersectionality education. She asserts:

*"[A] positive white identity is an impossible goal. White people do not exist outside of the system of white supremacy. ... Rather, I strive to be 'less white.' To be less white is to be less racially oppressive."*

When any of this is rebutted or questioned by white people, they are accused of experiencing "white fragility". Lest you think this condition of fragility means they are deserving of empathy; it is viewed as something "to get over".

This becomes a Gospel issue because it hints that God was wrong in making white people or that His plan went awry in different ways for different racial groups, presuming different plans of salvation are needed for each. The new and unbiblical definitions lead to a works-based religion or worldview, discourage true hope, and "would have us correct Jesus in His dying breath at Calvary."

If whites live in a permanently irredeemable state, then it makes sense for theorists/activists to preach works for the alleviation of wrongdoing (sin). If these concepts are conflated into Gospel issues, then Christ's death alone is not the answer, and works are needed, but the resulting salvation is fraudulent and empty.

Diversity is biblical, but the term "race" is not. One must be careful not to attribute unbiblical concepts to diversity, or else the efforts might quickly pervert the true Gospel.

## **Equity is Biblical**

For starters, the *Just Thinking* podcast has a thorough write up on biblical equity. For our purposes, let's start with a working definition. The Oxford Dictionary defines "equity" as "the quality of being fair and impartial". This definition of equity is consistent with biblical use.

"Fair and impartial" does not presume that life will be perfect, but

that we should advocate for equal and impartial treatment. We all have different gifts and abilities which affect the economic realities of life. And yet, our American culture uses the term “equity” to mean “equality of outcome guaranteed”, according to Strachan, and too often that’s achieved by treating different groups with partiality.

These definitions are vastly different. The Bible never teaches that we will all end up with the same number of earthly belongings. And, truly, it would be impossible to keep redistributing earthly belongings to try to keep up with cultural equity. This is what culture teaches, but this is not what God intended. However, in the halls of academia, on the playing fields of major sporting associations, in the world’s boardrooms, and splashed all over all popular media, equity plays out as partial treatment. If this is true, who decides what circumstances are equitable in America? Academic scholars and DEI activists now populate task forces to assess what is equitable for institutions, organizations, workplaces, and society, doing so by means of partiality, not impartiality, by fallible man and not wise and perfect God.

## **Inclusion is Biblical**

God tells us to love all people. Jesus reached out to tax collectors, prostitutes, and those society considered unlovable. Christ invites all people to Him and extends forgiveness without discrimination, so they may join the family of God.

Inclusion is a biblical concept. As New Testament believers, we know all things must align with the Gospel the way the Bible presents it, not according to the new, works-based gospel of woke-ism.

In worldly terms, however, inclusion means accepting all behaviors and identities, including those not grounded in biblical truth. This makes the world’s manner of inclusion unbiblical, but for a growing population that increasingly feels marginalized, it’s a very compelling definition and becoming more popular by the day.

According to Theory scholars, inclusion is now the idea of accepting all people and behaviors as they see themselves. You can define yourself however you desire. There is no need for scientific evidence to support your definition. One manifestation in this context allows society to create new labels and change the biblical text that God created man and woman.

If we accept CRT proponents' definitions and concepts, then we concede that God's Word is not inerrant and that He is no longer perfect. If we accept these concepts of Theory and wokeness, Christ would no longer be eligible to be the perfect, blameless sacrifice for our sins. We would have no hope of salvation.

Biblical inclusion, as exemplified by Christ is pictured as adoption adopted into God's family as His children. We join His family through our identity with Christ, God's Son, taking on His Sonship as our own, passing through suffering and death in His humanity. And all of that is regardless of our experience of inclusion in this world.

### **So, is DEI Biblical?**

It depends on what definitions you accept as Truth. If you begin with a presupposition that the Bible is God's Word and therefore true, DEI could be biblical. But the definitions for DEI created by society go against biblical Truth. DEI as understood by culture is not biblical.

If DEI is not biblical, is it ethical to teach DEI in Christian settings? I do not encourage the use of woke terminology, but I do see how it is necessary to use the terms to educate and engage in cultural conversations. I believe when Truth is on the line it is detrimental and destructive to link God's inerrant Word to these anti-biblical ideas. Many Christians also find difficulty interacting in organizations, businesses, or institutions that maintain DEI departments because they become focused on numbers and make hiring decisions or develop human resources protocol based on skin color or gender rather than skill or character. God never focuses on a person's skin color. He looks at hearts.

## **What is the Ethical Response to Diversity, as Defined by the Bible?**

I recommend this two-fold response:

Educate Christians and seekers desiring to learn

Respond biblically

The Church and Christian ministries need to address anti-biblical concepts and definitions. If the body of Christ is to be informed, live biblically, and recognize Truth, then there must be clear education about Theory and wokeness.

Education often starts with establishing our own set of presuppositions and challenging learners to root out any weaknesses. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Do I really want to know Truth?
- If I believe God and His Word are absolute Truth and inerrant, how do I respond to cultural messages that do not align with Scripture?
- Am I angry that God's Word seems hard at times or that I may need to check sources that I have previously trusted against Scripture?
- It is biblical to test and approve leaders and their messages—is what I'm hearing or reading aligning with Scripture?
- It is helpful to read secular and Christian sources to frame the discussion—am I open to studying other perspectives?
- Have I read the works of DEI theorists and activists and compared them with Scripture?
- Am I open to facts and logic?

These questions should not be taken lightly or ignored by believers or by Christian leadership. When a leader or organization chooses to learn from or train others in sources from Theorists, and not merely to read to understand their arguments, the decision to promote worldly concepts over God's Word has already been made. It's not a strawman

argument. The conscious opposition to Christianity is encoded in the construct of both CRT and Intersectionality. Christianity is considered oppressive, therefore its adherents are less deserving of a hearing or consideration because of their privileged status.

How will believers know what is the ethical response if the Church and Christian ministries are not brave enough to educate on anti-biblical messages and how they differ from the Truth? Opposing racism does not require accepting antiracism, a secular ideology created by Ibram X. Kendi. It also does not require support of the phrase or organization, Black Lives Matter, which promotes LGBTQ+ identity and the destruction of the nuclear family.

Secondly, if diversity is biblical and racism is real, but CRT, wokeness, and DEI are problematic, how should the Church respond? Let's speak the Truth and acknowledge facts, doing both from a biblical foundation. Scripture affirms many things regarding these issues, but it is necessary to distinguish what the text actually says (exegesis) rather

than reading into it what we wish it would say (eisegesis). Simply attaching verses to worldly definitions and concepts is neither helpful nor biblical.

**“Just because someone feels oppressed, their perspective is not elevated above God’s Word.”**

Racism is a sin issue. Believers need to willingly express this and not waiver when Theorists or their adherents demand we jump through cultural hoops to prove it. Let's listen to others'

perspectives, but not at the expense of Truth. Just because someone feels oppressed, their perspective is not elevated above God's Word. Believers should not feel required to support ideas and organizations that are not grounded in biblical principles.

Is it biblically ethical to create a department centered on DEI or an-

tiracism if God does not focus on skin color? His Son has torn down the wall of hostility between God and man (on which side are all men, not just those of a certain color) and invites all to be adopted into His family (Ephesians 2:13-22).

Would it not be better to start with a program on Biblical Unity? After becoming familiar with DEI, false definitions, and biblical terms, we should focus on unity and adoption in Christ, building listening skills with a posture toward respect, and remembering that all people and their struggles matter equally.

I urge readers to invest time to learn about different ethnic groups and peoples because God made us all to be different. Speak the Truth and recognize facts. Research God's Word for biblical responses to current issues. Make sure all you do is grounded in exegesis, not eisegesis. Be slow to speak, respond, and act. You don't owe anyone an answer in a specific timeframe. Do not feel guilty that you want ample time to make sure your response is biblical. Ask questions and surround yourself with biblical mentors from different environments to make sure what you are hearing is grounded in God's Word.

## **Where to Start?**

For further reading on developing a biblical response to topics such as diversity or racism, these resources are highly recommended:

- Owen Strachan – *Christianity and Wokeness*. This is the most thorough biblical response. There are questions at end of each chapter allow this text to be used as group curriculum.
- Center for Biblical Unity (CFBU) – Social media presence and “Reconciled” curriculum. CFBU provides a beginner curriculum to understand “diversity”. There is a great web presence for educating and active response to biblical injustice.
- Voddie Baucham – *Fault Lines* and YouTube videos. Baucham provides facts and shares lived experience in his book; the videos are great biblical responses.



- Thaddeus Williams – *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth*. This is a less controversial response, which includes individual stories.
- Virgil Walker/Darrell Harrison – *Just Thinking Podcast*. This is an exegetical podcast on current issues.
- Abraham Hamilton III – *The Hamilton Corner Podcast*. Hamilton is a Christian lawyer who gives biblical perspective and response to social justice issues.

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## Don't Take the Bait: Three Reasons Pastors Must Avoid the Booby Trap of Pulpit Plagiarism

By David Schrock



### “Dad, what is a booby trap?”

Recently, in conversation with one of my sons, the subject of guerilla warfare came up, which in turn led to explaining how booby traps have often been used in war. Because my son has not seen the classic primer on booby traps, the 1980s treasure-seeking adventure, *Goonies*, I proceeded to explain some of the ways booby traps worked in during the Vietnam War.

Speaking outside my area of expertise, I cobbled together some explanation that passed for the time. If I had to speak further on the subject, a quick Google search might lead me to a Field Army Manual like this one: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/>. And in this case, I would share with my son the following

facts that I learned from Chapter 13: *Booby Traps and Expedient Devices*. I'd also share the fact that I am quoting.

- From the internet, we discover that booby traps:
- Are usually explosive in nature.
- Are actuated when an unsuspecting person disturbs an apparently harmless object or performs a presumably safe act.
- Are designed to kill or incapacitate.
- Cause unexpected, random casualties, and damage.
- Create an attitude of uncertainty and suspicion in the enemy's mind, thereby, lowering his/her morale and inducing a degree of caution that restricts or slows his/her movement.

Now, what do booby traps have to do with preaching? The answer is that booby traps are an apt illustration for plagiarism in the pulpit. Indeed, preaching another pastor's shiny sermon is an alluring temptation, and when set by the Enemy, this booby trap discredits pastors and disrupts churches. In other words, plagiarism in the pulpit "create[s] an attitude of uncertainty and suspicion in the enemy's mind".

In this case, the "enemy", as named by C.S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters*, is the Bride of Christ. In battle, booby traps wage psychological war. By analogy, pulpit plagiarism does the same. When pastors take the bait and use the sermons of another, they invite the flock of God to question the pastor, his sermon, and the whole enterprise of preaching.

To riff on C. S. Lewis' explanation, pulpit plagiarism when sprung from the darkness into the light, has all the makings of a Screwtape strategy, crafted to demoralize the people who previously trusted the pastor. Or worse, they go along with the pastor, letting him feed them with meals prepared for someone else.

Anticipating an objection here, I will acknowledge that there will be

some who do not care if a pastor uses the work of others. And there will be many more who do not know. But, just like booby traps that are yet un-sprung, their presence does not make the situation any less dangerous. In the case of pastors reaching for pre-packaged sermons, there is no telling how this booby trap will explode or who will be maimed. The only solution, therefore, is to avoid the booby trap altogether. So, in what follows, I offer three reasons for fleeing pulpit plagiarism. These three reasons are adapted from my book, *Brothers, We Are Not Plagiarists*, a new work engaging the subject of pastoral plagiarism.

## **Pulpit Plagiarism Threatens the Credibility of a Pastor**

In 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3 and Titus 1, Paul begins his list of pastoral qualifications with this simple description: the elder must be “above reproach”. Paul even lists this characteristic twice in Titus 1:5, 7. In the second occurrence, Paul says, “*For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach*” (verse 7). Stewardship for Paul relates to teaching God’s Word, and thus the one who brings God’s Word must not have any moral or character flaws that would threaten the communication of that message.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what plagiarism does. Undetected plagiarism may, for a time, not threaten the gospel’s content, but when it is discovered that a herald of the truth has not been truthful, all sorts of questions arise. These doubts are the psychological shrapnel of the booby trap.

If you haven’t noticed, the reputations of pastors are not doing well today, and incidents of plagiarism—whether we think they are justified or not—do not help. When an incident of pulpit plagiarism is revealed, the watching world writes articles exposing the removal of past sermons and laughs at the Church. And more harmful, those who might come to church are less likely to listen to the preaching of God’s Word.

To avoid this kind of accusation, Paul says of the overseer: “*He*

*must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil”* (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:7). Indeed, God calls pastors to be above reproach so that we do not become a distraction to the truths of the gospel. And thus, the first reason pastors must refuse the bait of pulpit plagiarism is for the sake of their own credibility and the reliability of the Word they preach.

## **Pulpit Plagiarism Falsifies the Gift of Teaching**

As Paul stresses in his pastoral epistles, the pastor is a teacher (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:3–11; 2:12–3:7; 5:17–18; 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:1–7, 15; 22–26; Titus 1:5–9; 2:1; Ephesians 4:11). But plagiarism undermines this pastoral qualification and makes it impossible to tell if someone is gifted to teach or if he is simply skilled to speak. Worse, if a young preacher permits himself to use the work of others, he will never develop the gifts God has given him, which will lead to a perceived skill in preaching that does not match his actual gifting. To put it bluntly, plagiarism will inevitably mis-

place men in ministry.

**“Plagiarism short-circuits this weekly rhythm— hindering the soul of the preacher...”**

For the sake of preachers and their churches, we cannot permit pastors to “retweet” sermons (retweeting is a specific kind of plagiarism defined by Turnitin resources). Such a practice is a recipe for long term disaster—for the preacher and the Church, both local and universal. Let’s focus on pastors for a moment. One way by which men

are sustained in ministry is by studying the Word, nourishing their own souls, and bringing to their congregations the Bread of Life, from which they have already eaten. Plagiarism short-circuits this weekly rhythm—hindering the soul of the preacher, threatening the pastoral office, and changing the nature of gospel ministry. For this reason, pastors and their churches must refuse the bait of pulpit plagiarism.

## Pulpit Plagiarism Changes the Pastoral Office from Bible Teacher to Christian Performer

For those familiar with trends in ministry over the last century, you will not be surprised by the popularity of preachers borrowing sermon material or relying on teams for their sermon preparation. As theologian, David Wells, demonstrated in his many books, pastors have become

**“For this reason, pastors must reject the bait of pulpit plagiarism, as must church bodies.”**

ministry managers, therapeutic counselors, and church-growth professionals. This is a far cry from the biblical pattern of pastors as stewards of the Word and heralds of the Truth. The current tendency to encourage borrowing sermon material, instead of repudiating it, is the sad—but unsurprising—fruit of losing a biblical approach to the pastorate.

When we go back to the pastoral epistles, however, we don’t find teams collaborating to create sermons. We find gifted men who studied the Scripture and labored hard to feed the flock with the Word. Most explicitly, Paul says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:15, *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”* This verse, which addresses the individual preacher, single-handedly denies the place for borrowing material. Why? Because it is impossible to be approved as a faithful handler of God’s Word if you are using someone else’s best material.

Certainly, we could get into all the ways that pastors rightly lean on others in the process of sermon-writing, and in my book, I spend an entire chapter outlining this very thing. Every preacher depends on those who have gone before him. Commentaries, and those who write them, are gifts to the church. Any pastor who refuses to use them is fooling himself. Even Paul, in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:1–2, encourages Timothy to



remember what Paul has said so that he can teach faithful men who will then teach others. Moreover, at the end of his life, Paul is still learning, as he requests his parchments (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:13). So, there is a place for learning from others, but plagiarism sours the goodness of this fraternity of preachers (Acts 13:1–3).

Because teachers will be judged more severely (James 3:1), they must give an account for what they teach and how they teach it. In the Pastoral Epistles, the elders who are gifted to teach are called to be stewards of the Word, faithful servants who teach sound doctrine from the Scriptures. Unfortunately, a culture of plagiarism changes the nature of this ministry. Pastors are led away from being prayerful disciples of God's Word to being skillful distributors of man's sermons. Such a change impairs the ability of the preacher to give an account for his words, and it denies the preacher the need to be skilled in biblical knowledge, languages, doctrine, or the wiles of the human heart. Freedom from doing the work of preparing sermons each week may open up times to do other ministry (counseling, discipling, etc.), but in the long run, the local church is impoverished when its primary teacher is not steeped in the Bible.

For this reason, pastors must reject the bait of pulpit plagiarism, as must church bodies. Healthy churches need biblically qualified (healthy) pastors, and such requisite health only comes by laboring in the Word and delivering in the pulpit what was discovered in the study.

## **Don't Take the Bait**

In the end, the message is simple: don't take the bait! Pulpit plagiarism is a booby trap, spring-loaded to "create an attitude of uncertainty and suspicion, in the enemy's mind, thereby, lowering his morale and inducing a degree of caution that restricts or slows his movement."

In the Church, for those willing to listen, this is exactly what has happened and is happening. Instead of gaining confidence for the people of God by expecting pastors to preach their own work, church associa-

tions, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, have been stymied by the presence of pulpit plagiarism. And the problem has been magnified by the empathetic allowance of these practices.

Most recently, the resolution committee of the Southern Baptist Convention declined three resolutions calling for a rejection plagiarism in the pulpit. They wrote in response to each:

*“While the Committee affirms the thesis that preaching is a sacred trust from God for which preachers are accountable to Him, we do not believe that the Convention has yet reached any informed consensus on the many specific burdens placed upon pastors within the text of this proposed resolution.”*

Dismissing these resolutions may have prevented a heated debate in Anaheim, but it did so with a flimsy appeal to pastoral “burdens” based upon a lack of “informed consent”. What this shows is not compassion for pastors and churches, but an unwillingness to let the Word of God speak. Remember, Paul’s pastoral epistles were written by someone whose ministerial burdens far exceeded anything we know today (see 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, *passim*). From Paul’s hand we have received the divinely inspired qualifications for preaching in the household of faith. Only by willful redefinition of the pastoral office can churches circumvent God’s expectation for pastors, which centers on two things: (1) integrity in life and (2) industry in the study of God’s Word. Burdens or not, God’s qualifications remain the same.

To this end, I have sought in this article (and in my book, *Brothers, We Are Not Plagiarists*), to issue a biblical call for pastors and churches to trust the Word of God and to require pastors to preach their own material. This is not an undue burden, but the ethical standard set forth by God’s Word itself. Of course, every pastor’s gifting, context, and congregation is different, but it is not extreme to require pastors to preach the sermon that they themselves have prepared.

The alternative is to let pastors do the work of Christ's Enemy and to promote, with every plagiarized sermon, a spirit of uncertainty and suspicion. This is the booby trap. Today, more than ever, we need pastors to refuse to take the bait and churches who will reject those pastors that do.

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## Recommended Reading on Christian Ethics

In this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, we've been considering Christian ethics, how Christians should view it, and how to engage in it. We understand that we haven't covered everything on this topic, but it is our prayer that, hopefully, readers of this issue will grow in their understanding of this topic so they can stand fast on the Word of God.

If you've found this issue helpful and would like to study this subject further, please check out the following reading list. These books are at the top of their genre in both excellence and readability.

- *Principles of Conduct* by John Murray
- *How Should I Live in This World* by R.C. Sproul
- *Reformed Ethics* by Herman Bavinck
- *Evangelical Ethics* by John Jefferson Davis
- *Practical Religion* J.C. Ryle

Obviously, there are many more great books on this subject not listed here, but hopefully you will find this a good place to start.

In Christ,  
Dave Jenkins  
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

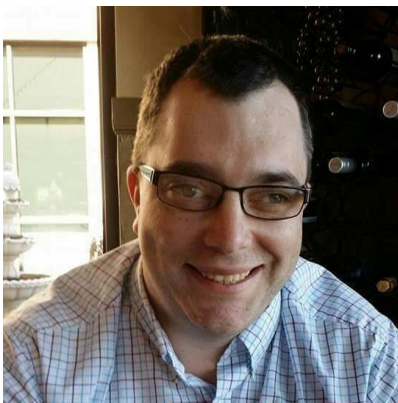


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### ***Kelly Benware***

Kelly Benware spent her early years learning Spanish in Latin America, earning a BS and MA in Intercultural Studies, and working in various Christian organizations and universities. After years in a seemingly woke “Christian” environment, she noticed the diversity conversation changing. The anti-biblical message of the new “social justice” gospel forced Kelly to ask some pertinent questions, as it should do the same for all of us. Her research led to the formation of “Steadfast Truth Ministries”, a 501c3 of which she is both Founder and President.

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