

Hollow and Deceptive Philosophies

An Evening with Tom Ascol

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Bible Verse: Colossians 2:8
Preached on: Tuesday, November 17, 2020

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I love the singing and I told Don earlier, just I feel at home here, even the layout of this room is similar. This is much more beautiful than ours but the layout of it and the way that it's arranged and the way you sing and things you sing, it just makes me feel at home and I'm so grateful to be here. I count it a real privilege and an honor to be here. I heard your pastor sometime in the last year inadvertently, I read something he wrote and I sent it to somebody and I said, "Man, this is really good. I don't know who this is." And he says, "Oh, that's Don Green." He said, "You ought to get to know him." And so I thought, "Well, that would be great." And then lo and behold, we had a mutual friend in Travis Allen and he put us together. So thank you for this wonderful privilege and opportunity to be with you.

As I thought about the Christian life and especially in light of the things that are going on in the last few years in the Evangelical world here in America, I'm sometimes stunned that anybody makes it to heaven. You know, even when you read the Bible, you read the Bible and see all the warnings of dangers and the things that are set before us, the obstacles on the way to heaven, you think, "How does anybody go from sin to right relationship with God and be kept in that and making it all the way to heaven?" I mean, sometimes just put that question in your mind and as you read through the Scriptures, just note the warnings, note the warnings that are given to us. The Old Testament is filled with warnings about false prophets. In fact, I think it's Deuteronomy 13 where Moses warns the people before they go into the land of promise, he said, "There are going to be prophets arise, they're going to do miraculous things but they're going to teach wrongly and it's going to be a test to see if you're going to stay true to what God's revealed when these guys come in the name of God and say things contrary to what God has actually revealed."

The Scripture says that we face enemies as Christians. Those enemies can be categorized into three large areas. We have the enemy of our own sin that remains within us. We have the enemy of the world which are these godless systems that are opposed to us. Then we have the enemies of the devil and all of his minions. And so we have inside enemies, we have enemies surrounding us, coming at us from all directions, and then we have enemies above us that are personal, that think, that strategize, and all of these enemies are designed to keep us from God, to keep us from making it safely home.

In the Old Testament, we find the prophets warning God's people against being tripped up by the enemies arrayed against them. So example, Jeremiah 9:6 says that false teachers heap up oppression upon oppression and deceit upon deceit, and they refuse to know the Lord. These are false teachers, teachers that come in the name of the Lord and yet who in reality are deceiving people. Their design is to deceive.

In Jeremiah 23:16 the Lord says, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD." False prophets, people that would normally be expected for others to show some respect to them. They would expect you to listen to them. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount that we should beware because there will be false prophets that will arise and they will come among the flock as if they are sheep, but inwardly they're wolves. They have the clothing of sheep, which means a sheep must have died somewhere along the line if a wolf's got a sheep's clothing on.

Psalms and Proverbs are filled with calls to be on our guard against those who would lead us away from God, especially those who come to us with smooth talk. And so we have warnings like in Psalm 55 about the one whose words are smooth as butter and yet he has swords on his tongue, he has evil in his heart.

Paul warns against smooth talkers in Romans 16 where he writes, "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught." We just talked about things that are contrary to what the word of God says and Paul says, "Watch out for people like this." He says, "Avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites," and listen to this, "and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive." So the warning is don't be naive. Don't be duped. Don't be taken in by those who are eloquent, who are able to say things in fine rhetorical flourish and who are persuasive and charismatic and winsome, but we've got to stay true to the doctrine that we've been taught.

Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8 that "the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." So God's people are to be sober, sober-minded, watchful. We're to be on guard.

Peter admonishes us in 2 Peter 3 to "take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability." I mean, why do we have these warnings in the Scripture unless there's danger? And the warnings are given to us to help get us safely home, and if we ignore the warnings or we downplay the warnings and we think we're beyond needing to be warned, then we're setting ourselves up to be tripped up in the very way that Scripture warns us not to be.

One of the most touching scenes in all the New Testament is Acts 20. Paul calls for the elders of the church at Ephesus where he spent more years than any other place where he ministered, and he asked them to meet him at Miletus, and in that conversation with them

he says, "You're never going to see my face again." And they weep. I mean, they weep there on the beach because they know this is the last time and in that conversation with these elders, these are men, I thought about this, Paul spent three years or so in Ephesus, it's almost certain that he won these men to Christ and appointed them in the office of elder. I mean, you know, Paul was involved in that, and so these are men that he knew, men that he had served with in that church in Ephesus, and so he's talking to them about what's going to happen. He says this, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock." Well, that's necessary counsel for every pastor, every elder, "the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained by his own blood." Then he says in verse 29 of Acts 20, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." Well, that's sober. I mean, can you imagine your elders hearing from an apostle and he says, "I know I'm going to die and there are going to be people that are going to come into this church that you are shepherding and they're going to try to destroy this flock." I mean, that would have, you know, you would think these men would say, "Okay, you know, we're going to be on high alert." But then he goes on, "and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them."

Can you imagine that scene? And maybe Paul knew, you know, maybe he already had an inkling or maybe revealed to him who it was, or maybe he had just been given the insight to know this is going to happen. But you know, it's almost like that scene in the Upper Room of Jesus and the disciples, "One of you is going to betray me." "Is it I? Who is it?" Paul's looking at these elders and he's saying, "From among your own number, this is going to happen."

One of the things that God used to help me to finally get over all my hesitancy in trying to address these things is to put a bag over everybody's face, the things that were being said and done, and I said like I'm going to forget who's saying them and doing them, I'm just going to look at what's being said and done and measure it by the Scripture and when I see that it's wrong, pull the bag up. I think, "I'm sorry that it's this person. I never would have guessed that he would do this." But this is where we are and this passage and other passages like it God has used to help me. If elders appointed by the Apostle Paul could go bad, who are we to think that we're immune to that? I mean, who am I to think as a pastor that I'm immune to this? If Peter could stand there at Caesarea-Philippi and say, "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God," and be commended by Jesus and say, "Flesh and blood hasn't revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven," and then a couple of minutes later say, "Jesus, no way, you're not going to Jerusalem to die. It's not going to happen," and Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan." If an apostle can be so quickly corrupted in his thinking by the devil that our Lord looks at him and says, "This is Satan speaking. This is Satan's ideas coming out of your mouth," who are we to think that our spiritual leaders and heroes are immune to this? We're not.

We're not which is why we must always be people of the word. That's why we've got to come back to Scripture time and again and say, "You know, if it's not according to the Scripture, I don't care who it is that's saying it, I don't care how trustworthy he's been for however many years it's been, it's got to square with the word or else we're going to have

to throw up some resistance and not be led astray." No wonder that Martin Luther put in his hymn, "Though this world is filled with devils, they threaten to undo us." You know, this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us. Well, that's right. I mean, that's what we face day-in and day-out.

One of the reasons I love "Pilgrim's Progress," I was talking to your pastor about this, is because Bunyan gets this. I mean, it's a dangerous journey. When he tells that allegorical story, he's trying to get, he shows us how Christian gets from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City and he doesn't get there on a bed of ease, he gets there with threats, and with dangers from within and from without, temptations, some he falls into, some that he sees and is able to resist. I'm afraid that today too often we are not thinking of Christian life as a fight, as a dangerous journey. We tend to think we're safe, we tend to think we're okay, we've done it so long we don't have much to fear about, and our spiritual lives are stable enough that we don't need to take the warnings of Scripture seriously. Brothers and sisters, if I could just leave you with one thing tonight it would be we must take what the Bible sets before us in terms of warning deadly seriously. We've got to have our eyes open all the time.

If we're complacent, then we will be set up to be played, that is, we will be set up to be manipulated which I think has happened to many within the Evangelical world in our day. And what I mean is this, that in the midst of this very difficult era when we are seeing all kinds of upheaval not only in our society but within our churches, I think what we are witnessing is a very intentional and deadly maneuver by the devil that is designed to lead pastors, Evangelical churches and leaders away from allegiance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to the authority and sufficiency of his word. Away from that. And we're not the first generation to face such efforts.

Theologian Kevin Vanhoozer has wisely noted that pastors and churches today must brace ourselves for a particular kind of spiritual warfare. This is what he writes, "For," he says, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, matters in motion, but against isms, against the powers that seek to name and control reality." And that's precisely what's going on today. We have these ideas that have come in that are trying to get us to name realities different than what the Bible says about them so that we might be controlled, then, by those realities and those who have told us that this is what they actually consist of. In other words, what we have going on today are people who are telling us what we're supposed to see, they're naming it, they're defining it for us, and they're demanding that we reorder our lives on the basis of what they tell us is reality. Well, God's the one who defines reality and we cannot assume that we understand and we're meaning the same thing when we use similar words to those that are advocating for this new way of living the Christian life.

I believe that in recent years many deadly ideologies have been smuggled into the Evangelical churches in our nation in various Evangelical organizations through the Trojan horse of social justice. We've talked about this a little bit already but social justice broadly is advocating in the name of reconciliation among the races and honoring women and loving and respecting sexually confused people, that we live in certain ways, say

certain things, not say other things which in generations past God's people would have rejected outright. In the name of love and justice, we are being asked to skate over things that the Bible actually does say.

The devil's been very effective in confusing people about what constitutes real justice and what actually working for justice entails, and it's precisely at this point that I think we are being manipulated. God is the one true source of justice. He's the righteous one. He defines what is just and what is unjust. He's the one who created the world. He is the one who tells us how we ought to live. He's given us his law, his commandments, and they define righteousness for us. Yet in the name of seeking justice, many Evangelicals are being told that we must see in the world certain inequities and work to overcome those inequities so that certain outcomes are reversed, and the way that we're being told to see and work is based upon ideologies contrary to Scripture, and if we can be satisfied with inequities in the world, then we are not being faithful followers of Christ. And we're being manipulated, we're being deceived. Proponents of hollow and deceptive philosophies are telling us what we must see, think and do if we're going to be genuine proponents of justice in the world.

Well, Pastor Don read earlier Colossians 2:6-10 and I want to focus on verse 8 of that passage. So if you have a copy of the Scriptures, please open up to that passage because Paul gives us a very specific warning that I think is so appropriate for us today. In this letter to the church at Colossae, Paul begins with an introductory expression of thanksgiving and prayer for the church, and then he launches into a wonderful explanation of the supremacy of Christ in verse 15 of chapter 1, and beginning in verse 24 of that chapter, he describes how that awareness of Christ and his supremacy informs his own ministry as an apostle and as a preacher of the Gospel. Well, our text is found in the midst of that description that Paul is giving about his own ministry. He gives an admonition in chapter 2, verses 6 and 7; he gives a warning that I want to focus on in verse 8; and then he gives reasons to heed the warning in verses 9 and 10. And we're not going to look at verses 6 and 7 so much or verses 9 and 10, but I do want to look at that verse 8 with you again.

So look at it. I'm reading from the ESV. Follow along. It says,

8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

I love the way that J. B. Lightfoot has paraphrased verse 8. Let me read it to you. He puts it like this, "Be on your guard and do not suffer yourselves to fall prey to certain people who would lead you captive by a hollow and deceitful system which they call philosophy. They substitute the traditions of men for the truth of God and they enforce an elementary discipline of mundane ordinances fit only for children. Theirs is not the Gospel of Christ."

What Paul is admonishing the Colossians and us to do here is to be so grounded in Jesus Christ, to be so connected to Christ as he is revealed in Scripture that nobody will be able to knock us off of that, nobody will be able to take us captive by hollow deceptive philosophies. In giving us this warning, he's sticking to his theme of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ so in verses 6 and 7 he says walk in Christ, just as we received Christ by faith we are to take him at his word, we're to live in him, we're to be rooted in him, built up in him, established in the faith as we've been taught from the beginning of our coming to know Christ. Verse 8, don't be taken captive. That's the warning. Verses 9 and 10, he buttresses his argument by reminding us that in Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells, we've been filled in him. In other words, don't let anybody lead you astray once you have Christ. If you have Christ, why in the world would you leave Christ? Why in the world would you think you needed something more than Christ to be right with God or to live in the fullness of what God has called you to be and do?

Well, what do we see in verse 8? Well, Paul tells us in this verse the goal of our spiritual enemies. He says our spiritual enemies want to take us captive by philosophy and empty deceit. That word "captive" is interesting. It's not used very often, only one time in the Bible, not many times outside of the Bible. It means "to plunder; to take spoils from the victory of a battle," which immediately cues us into Paul's thinking here that he has in mind, warfare. Warfare. Don't let anybody do this to you in warfare. Spiritual warfare. It's what we live with day-in and day-out. It's not just the fantastic things that we sometimes hear about or read about that go on on the mission field or other places, spiritual warfare is what we live day-in and day-out.

Again, if you go back to Ephesians 6 and you see how Paul unpacks the admonitions to stand firm and to put on the full armor of God, to resist the devil in the evil day in that passage from verses 10 through 18 of spiritual warfare, you think, "Well, what's he talking about?" Well, what he's talking about, the theaters of spiritual warfare are what he's just written about. In the husband and wife relationship. In the parent/children relationship in the home. In the slave/master relationship, or we might say the employer/employee relationship. So it's in your home. It's in your most intimate relationship. It's in your daily life. That's where this battle rages.

Well, Paul says, "Don't let anybody take you captive in this battle. We must not let it happen. See to it, watch, be on guard." Again, the imagery is that of what we might see as a Lieutenant leading his platoon through enemy territory. He says, "Okay, men, be alert. Watch out." Well, if we thought of ourselves like that regularly, we wouldn't be so easily played, we wouldn't be so quickly taken captive because we would be on alert, we would take this admonition seriously.

He says, "Make sure no one takes you captive in this way." He may have had specific people in mind. We don't know. We know there was some bad teaching already beginning to emerge there in the church of Colossae, some bad ideas that flourished in the next century and the century following. But we need to remember that such teachers, such bad ideas are always the instruments of the devil. Always. Just as Peter, an apostle of Jesus, in that moment unwittingly became an instrument of the devil, so too can

teachers that are among us. The devil's desire is always to take people captive to do his will, 2 Timothy 2:24-26. Paul uses that very language, "This is what the devil does," and he says, "Don't let this happen. Be on your guard."

So he tells us what the enemy's desire is, what the enemy goal is, and then he also tells us the method that our spiritual enemies will employ. How will they take us captive? By philosophy and empty deceit. Now Paul's not prohibiting philosophy as a field of study but this is the only time that he uses the word, but he's talking about ideologies that come from merely human sources. The word that he uses indicates a system of teaching and this system of teaching that he warns against is that which spiritual enemies would employ to capture our minds, to capture our thinking. He's talking about ideas, intellectual concepts and arguments, and this is a prohibition against particular kinds of philosophy, philosophies that are empty and deceptive. There are three words here and they're all tightly woven together with one definite article so we could read it "the philosophy and empty deceit." So I take that to mean empty deceptive philosophy, that which is spiritually bankrupt, that which sounds impressive but in reality is hollow.

Earlier in this chapter he talks about those plausible sounding arguments. Well, if it's plausible then you think, okay, I can see this, but don't be taken captive by that. These are according to human traditions, the first way he describes them, three different sources of them. One is human tradition. There is nothing inherently wrong with tradition. Paul commends tradition in places like 2 Thessalonians 2:15, but here it's merely human tradition. It's tradition that has nothing to do with what God has revealed and that's the problem with it. This is the problem that we see Jesus pointing out to the Pharisees in Mark 7:6 and 7 when he said, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" Human. Ideas that come from the minds of people, fertile imaginations but do not pass muster with what God has revealed. The Huguenot pastor, John Daly, put it like this, that teachings coming from mere tradition are "all of them nothing but folly and vanity in the sight of God, and though men boast of their utility, they are extremely hurtful as they pester consciences and busy them about with things which God has not ordained, and they turn them aside from his pure service to things which do not profit."

So human traditions. The second source that he warns us where these ideas come from is according to the elemental spirits of the world or elementary spirits of the world. This is a phrase that's hard to understand and there's been three kind of broad categories of understanding. One is that these things refer to the elements of the world, earth, wind and fire, and that may be the case, I don't think so. Another school of thought says these are references to basic elements of an idea or system, we might say the A, B, C's of a philosophy, and that could well be. But there's a third idea that is connected to supernatural beings and this has history in Jewish thought and I think it fits more closely with Paul's language of what he referred to earlier about being taken captive, that we should not be spoiled in war by this, and the real danger however that he's referring to has nothing to do with those three things that he warns against but rather it is what he says, "not according to Christ." Not according to Christ. That's the key. It doesn't come from

Christ, it's not revealed by God, it isn't compatible with right understanding of the person and work of Jesus. So it's incompatible with the Gospel. It doesn't fit with what we've had revealed to us about God's way of saving sinners.

I love what Curtis Vaughn has said about this, he says, "Christ is the polestar of theology, the standard by which all doctrine is to be measured. Any system whatever its claims or pretensions is to be rejected if it does not conform to the revelation which God has given us in him." And brothers and sisters, this is always the great danger, that we will imbibe thinking or teaching that will lead us away from Christ, and it may not be readily apparent at the outset, it may be just a slight deviation but we have got to be so clear on the Gospel that as Paul put it in Galatians 1, that even if an angel from God were to come and preach a different Gospel, we would be prepared to say to that angelic being anathema. Anathema. Well, the only way we're going to be able to do that is to be grounded in Christ, to be so grounded in Christ that we will not be led astray by these vain empty philosophies.

This is Paul's concern that he expresses for the Corinthians when he warns them in 2 Corinthians 11 about false teachers that are in their midst as well. He says in verse 3 of 2 Corinthians 11, "I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." Work hard to be grounded in Jesus. Work hard to lay hold of the simplicity of Christ so that when teachers arise and tell you if you're going to have Jesus than you've got to do this as well, or if the Gospel is not enough then you've got to do this and add to it. Don't let anyone do that to you. Be grounded and clearheaded in your devotion to Christ. Our cry should be Isaiah 8:20, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

Now I believe this passage, Colossians 2:8, applies directly to the social justice movement of our day. This movement has its origins in an unbelieving world. It's made deep inroads into the Evangelical churches and institutions of our day in many places. In fact, Colossians 2:8 was really the key passage behind the Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel that was released two years ago, 2018. I was involved in the framing of that document and this was a verse that was ringing in our ears as we tried to articulate our concerns and issue a warning to our fellow Christians. That document has this statement at the beginning, "In view of questionable sociological, psychological and political theories presently permeating our culture and making inroads into Christ's church, we wish to clarify certain key Christian doctrines and ethical principles prescribed in God's word." Those questionable sociological, psychological and political theories, they need to be identified, they need to be understood, they need to be kept in their proper places and that's what I would like to try to do in the few minutes that we have left.

I'm convinced that the modern social justice movement is at its heart antithetical to biblical Christianity. I don't think there's any compatibility between them. As a result, when Christians uncritically embrace and promote today's social justice movement, they are in danger of being taken captive by these unbiblical ideologies and led away from

Christ. I love what Thaddeus Williams of Biola says. He explains it this way, "The problem is not with the quest for justice, the problem is what happens when that quest is undertaken from a framework that is not compatible with the Bible and this is a very real problem because the extent to which we unwittingly allow unbiblical worldview assumptions to shape our approach to justice is the extent to which we are inadvertently hurting the very people we seek to help." I think that's exactly what's going on and so the reason I'm against the social justice movement is because I am for justice. I'm for biblical justice. I want to see justice done and what is being proposed in the name of social justice by so many in our day is actually an undermining of biblical justice and of the biblical Gospel.

Well, what do we mean by social justice? Well, it's a term that's difficult to define, in fact, more recently I've come to call it critical social justice to tie it into critical theory as we talked about earlier. I like what Antonio Martino in Italian Economist and Politician astutely noted about the idea of social justice. He said, "Social justice owes its immense popularity precisely to its ambiguity and meaninglessness. It could be used by different people holding quite different views to designate a wide variety of different things. Its obvious appeal stems from its persuasive strength from its positive connotations which allows the user to praise his own ideas and simultaneously express contempt for the ideas of those who do not agree with him." That's exactly what's going on today. "You know, we're for justice, we're for social justice and this is what it means, and anybody that disagrees, you know, how dare you? Why don't you love people? Why don't you care about justice?"

One of the standard college textbooks on the subject of social justice is called "Reading for Diversity and Social Justice." That textbook defines social justice as the elimination of all forms of social oppression. So where oppression exists, social justice seeks to do away with it and that's a good thing, right? I mean, what Christian would say that we ought to just turn a blind eye to injustice? We have passages like Isaiah 1:17 where we are admonished to "learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." We have Psalm 82:3 which says, "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute." It's precisely at this point that I think the sleight of hand happens because these biblical categories, these biblical admonitions that every Christian ought to be sensitive to and want to be compliant with are held up to us and we're told that we must pursue justice because the Bible teaches it, and we say yes and amen, and then those proponents of social justice come in and say, "And this is what it means. This is how you pursue justice." And when somebody tells you that, we teach our people regularly when you hear the word "ought" and "should," immediately ought to be going off in your mind, "By what standard? Says who? Says who? Don't ought me. Don't should me unless you give me some sense of, 'Thus saith the Lord,' if there's not some biblical basis to the oughtness and the shouldness."

For more than 150 years, Marxism has been offering answers to the question of by what standard or how we ought to pursue justice. They did it first in terms of economics as we discussed earlier, but in more recent decades it has been done in terms of what's now

being called neo-Marxism or cultural Marxism that looks at the inequities, the oppression and the oppressed not strictly in economic categories but in sociological categories.

Joe Carter, who previously was with the ERLC, published an article a couple years ago at the Gospel Coalition entitled "Kinism, Marxism and the Synagogue Shooter," back in the Pennsylvania case, I think it was, where a man went in and shot up a synagogue. In that article and in some later exchanges that I had with Carter directly, he says that the term "cultural Marxism" is racist jargon that originated from a racist worldview perpetuated by anti-Semites, and he said that to use "cultural Marxism" as a category is a racist and anti-Semitic dog whistle that should be abandoned by Christians. So Joe Carter would say that what I'm doing tonight by referring to Marxism, neo-Marxism, cultural Marxism, is a dog whistle to white supremacists, that I'm simply trying to show my bona fides to those who really hate Jews and hate racial minorities. Well, I disagree with him obviously, to use that language, and I think that his understanding is exactly wrong and I think that his way of thinking is a part of this whole manipulative play that's being made against churches in our Western culture.

Al Mohler helps us to understand why Carter and those like him object to the use of the term. He explains the widespread use of this ideology in the academy, commenting on an article by David Brooks that was written in 2018. Mohler says, "Many on the left are saying that cultural Marxism is the bogeyman of the right, that it's an invented position amongst conservatives, but that's not so. What's driving the left is indeed nothing less than a form of cultural Marxism which has been taught on college and university campuses for a long time and is now the lingua franca, it is the symbolic universe in which the younger progressives live."

So cultural Marxism is this adaptation of economic Marxism, applying the theory to sociological relationships. Classical Marxism saw class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, that is, the haves and the have-nots, but cultural Marxism views such conflict as between the oppressed and the oppressors, between the privileged and those without privilege, between the working class is replaced by minorities in cultural Marxism. Majority groups are defined as privileged and oppressive. Minority groups are regarded as underprivileged and oppressed. So what this means is that white, male, heterosexual, cis-gendered, which means you agree with the sexuality you were assigned at birth, able-bodied Christians are a part of this oppressive power structure that has rigged the game for their own advantage, and the more of those categories that you find yourself not in, puts you in the oppressed classes that has been oppressed by this rigged game, and you are being taken advantage of.

This way of viewing the world has given rise to a philosophical movement or ideology known as critical theory. Critical theory is a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole. It needs to be contrasted with traditional theory. I've got a degree in sociology but I was taught traditional social theory. Critical social theory is different than traditional social theory. Traditional social theory says how do people react in groups, how are we to understand these dynamics, and it observes and it tries to understand and explain. Critical social theory says, yes, we must understand but that's not

enough, we must change. It is always activist. It is always trying to overthrow what is for the sake of what ought to be.

So critical theory has an agenda and the agenda is always in the name of love and compassion to overthrow the powers that are oppressive. And we see this on display. We've seen it in this political system, this political season. I mean, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, I mean, she's a living embodiment of this. Every time she talks, she is speaking about, you know, how to get in charge because all the people that have been at the top have just been so oppressive and it's time for others to get in charge and get on top of things. If you want to see a case study of it, just Google Bret Weinstein, Evergreen State University, liberal atheist who was run out of town, life threatened by this very ideology because he dared to raise questions that 10 years ago would have been seen as innocuous. You can see how problematic this ideology becomes if it's allowed to define those who are oppressed and those who are regarded or responsible for seeking justice for them and what that justice entails, and yet that's exactly what's going on across our nation, and it's making inroads into our churches.

There are several tenets of critical theory. Let me give you three main ones. First one is that your fundamental identity is not who you are as an individual but it's who you are related to the groups you belong to. So the number of oppressed categories that you can identify with gives you more credibility to speak about justice because you have been treated unjustly. So your identity is not primarily rooted in who you are as an individual, it's rooted in who you are as a part of these groups.

Secondly, your fundamental moral duty is to work for the liberation of oppressed groups. That's what it means to do justice. You can't just say these are the things that we see, you've got to be working diligently in overthrowing oppression. So now then a big movement is because of Ibram Kendi. He's written a book called "How to Be Antiracist." There is no such thing as not racist. You're either racist or antiracist. So if you say, "Well, I'm not a racist," well, that just proves you're a racist and the only way you get out of that is by becoming an antiracist according to his definition by doing these things. If you're not doing these things according to his dictates, then you are inherently inevitably a racist.

The third tenet of critical theory that's important for us to know is that lived experience is more important than objective evidence and reason in understanding oppression. So this is sometimes called standpoint epistemology. Nobody can tell me what my truth is because I'm the only one who's lived my truth, and I've lived in this category, I've lived in this way, I've experienced these things and, again, the more oppressive your identities have been, the more authority you have speak on injustice. And that is your truth and nobody can legitimately question it.

Well, these ideas have come into the Evangelical world, as I said. I could give you some examples. Let me just limit myself to one or two of these. This is Timothy Isaiah Cho who's got an NDF Westminster Seminary, contributor to White Horse Inn, involved in other Evangelical efforts. He writes, "The Bible is written from the lens of the

marginalized. If you come from a group or community that's historically not marginalized, you need these voices and perspectives or else your understanding of the word, the Gospel, and the Christian life will be thin and weak." So if you're a majority culture, you're inevitably held to be left with a thin, weak understanding of the Bible unless you listen to those who come from minority cultures.

Or consider Andy Draycott, an associate professor of theology and Christian ethics at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. He presented a paper at the 2018 Evangelical Theological Society entitled "Walking Across Gender in the Spirit? The Vocation of the Church and the Transgendered Christian." He asks this question, "Should we consider transgender Christians as having a good self-understanding?" And in his paper he gave an unqualified yes, they do. Further, he used the ordinance of baptism as an analogy as a way to help us think about transgendered Christians because they died to their old identity and they are raised now in a new gender. Well, his paper got all kind of pushback once it became public, as you can imagine, so much so that the administration at Talbot called upon him to issue a statement. So he issued a statement and he apologized for his lack of clarity in his presentation. He is sorry people misunderstood him, and his paper is very clear. It's not a matter of misunderstanding, he was advocating thinking he was doing something very loving that transgendered Christians, so-called, actually model for us the ordinance of baptism.

Well, we've seen women saying that they need to be allowed be preachers, that they should be pastors of churches or else they're being oppressed. This is a movement now that's well within many Evangelical circles as well.

And by naming names and talking about people who have advocated these things, I'm not suggesting that they are intentionally buying into critical theory but I am suggesting that they are being influenced by ideologies that they're unaware of at least. Some of them might be true believers but others at least are being unwittingly influenced by them, and what we've got to do is sound the alarm where we see this and ask the question, "Is this according to Christ? Does the Gospel square with these ways of thinking about the world and these positions being advocated?" Christ has given us his word. It's authoritative and sufficient and final, and we should not be embarrassed by any of his word. He's the one who established this world. He has created hierarchies in this world. He's the one who says that the church is to be led by qualified men. He's the one who says that the husband is to be the head of the wife, the father is to be the head of the household. He's the one who created men binary, humanity binary, men and women and no other sexes, no other genders. You cannot honor God and say that you're going to change what God has created you to be as male and female. These are God's designs. This is God's world. If we're going to live well in God's world, then we're going to have to understand as much as we can from his word how he has designed it and how he has designed us to live in it, and when we fall short of his design and we violate what he's revealed to be right and good and true, then we need to come to the realization that we have sinned and rebelled against our Creator and we need a Savior and we need forgiveness. This is exactly why he sent his Son the Lord Jesus into the world and in Christ we have forgiveness, we have everything we need. We do not need to construct a new way of thinking about life and

reality. We have a Gospel and that Gospel is sufficient to make wrongs right, to make sinners in a right relationship with God.

Well, our world is a dangerous place. It has been so since Genesis 3. The dangers confronting us are particularly insidious because of the subtle ways that we find them insinuating their ideas into our thinking, especially as we see this happening in Christian churches. So brothers and sisters, we need to be aware. We need to be on guard. We need to see to it that nobody takes us captive by such hollow and deceptive philosophies.

Well, let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the Lord Jesus and we ask that you would help us to honor him in how we think and how we walk through this world. Help us to heed the warnings and the admonitions, to not think we're beyond them, and to be alert and aware knowing that we have enemies that would destroy us at any moment if you gave them leave to do so. So make us full of faith and joy and hope in Christ, and to not let anyone lead us astray from what you have given us in your Son. For we pray in his name. Amen.

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