

# MTD and the One True God

*Moralistic Therapeutic Deism*

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Well, we gather again on a Tuesday evening tonight to return to our study of the mouthful of summary called moralistic therapeutic deism. I have been talking about this for a while and so it rolls easily off of my tongue but it's a new concept for many and we're delighted to be able to bring it to light here this evening in a continuing way. It is the spirit of our age. It is what marks those who say that they believe in God and it just, when you start to recognize and understand it, you start to see it everywhere and realize its great influence in the way that people think and talk and think about God and even in the way that what they look for from a church, what they expect when they pray, so many different things are affected by this topic that we introduced last week.

What we said about MTD is this: it describes the presuppositions that define the worldview of many people who claim to believe in God and we looked at this and introduced it last week. There are five basic principles that are at work in the mind of our culture when it comes to thinking about God. The authors of the book "Soul Searching" described it in terms of teenagers but we realize that it's much more expansive than that. This is what adults and entire churches believe and teach and practice, and so it's very very important for us to be able to come to grips with it.

What we said last time and we put these out so I'm just going to read them by way of review, these five principles of presupposition. 1. A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth. 2. God wants people to be good and nice and fair to each other as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. The Bible is just kind of saying the same thing that other religions are, in other words. 3. The central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself. Hard to argue with that, who doesn't want to be happy and feel good? Why wouldn't you want that? How could a man stand in a pulpit and argue against that? Well, we'll find out because that's what I'm going to do. 4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when he is needed to resolve a problem. So you pray when something comes up that you can't handle or something unexpected happens, "God, help me in this difficulty," and then, you know, things go back to normal and you can forget about God until another need comes up. And finally, fifth and finally, good people go to heaven when they die. We looked at all of these last time. I'm sure there are copies of the message out in the lobby. Copies are available on download on our website and so that's just by way of review to get us oriented before I start talking at length here this evening.

Now, this is a challenging subject in many ways. It's challenging to respond to this because it is so subjective. It is so elusive. It's like sticking your hand in a big bowl of Jell-O and trying to squeeze something and bring it out and you just find that it just keeps slipping away from you, like putting your thumb on a drop of mercury and it squirts away every time you start to bring some pressure to bear upon it, and that's just the nature of it, and I think that this is important enough and I think one of the ways that you start to really nail it down is to deal with it slowly and carefully and let your mind start to think and engage about things that you already believe and know to be true. As things are brought to light as we're going through this and say, "Remember this about God. Remember this about Christ. You see how that compares to MTD." And all of a sudden the lightbulbs start to go on and you say, "Well, moralistic therapeutic deism could not possibly be a true and biblical expression of what truth is." It couldn't possibly be true because of these other things that we're going to bring to light and bring to bear. It's nothing new or complicated in that sense, but what you're left with is when you start to discern it and you start to get to the bottom of it, you see how pervasive it is and you see how wrong it is, then you're left with some unsettling conclusions to reach. We'll say in light of this, then much of what passes for Christianity is not even true. There are entire realms of people that think they are Christians who believe this and say that this is what Christianity is, and you start to realize that they couldn't possibly know Christ. They couldn't possibly be saved and think this way, and it's just very unsettling to realize that.

As we start to enter into this, we must remember, beloved, what the precious words of our precious Lord in Matthew 7 when he said that it is a narrow path to heaven and there are few who find it, and the road to destruction is broad and the gate is broad and many people enter through a broad gate that simply leads them to destruction. So the fact that this is a prevalent dominant worldview in culture at large and even within the professing church, broadly speaking, and we're going to say that, no, this is not the biblical Christianity at all, as stark as that may sound, as bold a claim as that may seem to be, beloved, it is consistent with the most basic things that our Lord taught about the entrance into the kingdom of heaven. A road that is broad and easy is the road that leads to destruction. It is not the true path to Christ, to reconciliation to God, to eternal life. That's not the true path by definition. If it's broad and easy, you should immediately say, "Wait a minute, something's wrong here. I don't know exactly what it is but if it's this broad and it's this easy, Christ himself warned me in Matthew 7 not to be sucked into something like that." And if you start to feel the suction of the vacuum hose pulling you into a mindset that says it's really broad and easy and there is no difficulty here, you need to realize that you need to disconnect from that and come back to Scripture and rethink everything about life. This is what most of professing Christianity needs to do, they need to rethink everything that they think is true about life because these predominant presuppositions are leading people to destruction and therefore it is crucial for us to bring Scripture to bear on it so that we can understand.

Al Mohler said this about moralistic therapeutic deism and I quote, he said that, "It appears to reflect the culture as a whole. Clearly this generalized conception of a belief system is what appears to characterize the beliefs of vast millions of Americans both

young and old. These individuals, whatever their age, believe that religion should be centered on being nice, a posture that many believe is directly violated by assertions of strong theological conviction." Now continuing the quote, stay with me, I'm still quoting Al Mohler here, he says, "In the end, this study," referring to the book, "Soul Searching," "In the end, this study indicates that American teenagers are heavily influenced by the ideology of individualism that has so profoundly shaped the larger culture. This bleeds over into a reflexive nonjudgmentalism and a reluctance to suggest that anyone might actually be wrong in matters of faith and belief."

So to kind of summarize and synthesize what that quote from Al Mohler, what you find from within the mindset if you're within the mindset of MTD, what we're doing here in refuting it and challenging it and saying it is wrong on multiple levels, what we are doing according to their mindset would automatically show that what we're doing is wrong because we're saying that someone is actually wrong in what they believe. So it's very slippery but the very nature and what I would say is one of the very subtle satanic aspects of this is, is that it's very nature is that it insulates itself from critique because by a prior statement, a prior presupposition it says judgmentalism or anything that declares anything to be wrong is automatically itself wrong, then it has insulated itself from any kind of critique and it's free to go about its own business. Well, what we're saying and what Scripture says, more importantly, is Scripture says to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. Scripture commended the Bereans in Acts 17:11 who were examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. You're not supposed to just drink in what somebody tells you and just drink in what the culture says. We are to go to God's word and to evaluate it. Here's a truth claim. Okay, let me take Scripture to bear and apply it to that truth claim and see if it withholds scrutiny or not, and that's what we're going to do with MTD.

Now, we asked this question last time. This book as I mentioned, was directed toward the beliefs of teenagers in American culture, but here's the question. No one, no one escapes the indictment of what follows here. Who is teaching these teenagers what they believe except their churches and their parents and adult figures who have some kind of influence over them? They didn't just come up with this on their own. This is what they have heard and imbibed from the authority figures around them, and what that means is that although the study was geared toward the belief systems of teenagers, what you actually find is that by implication it is showing what they have been taught by those who went before them, and therefore what this does is it just brings a heaping helping of condemnation upon the entire culture of religion in Western society, and what we want to do here is lend our meager voice to rise up against it and to stand opposed to these things, and most importantly to help you understand why that this mindset could not possibly be true.

So what we want to do starting this week and going for a few more weeks after this, is to look at these five points of moralistic therapeutic deism individually and evaluate them by Scripture. We're going to look at two of them this evening, if I get that far, then we'll look at the other three in subsequent weeks to follow.

So here's what I want to do. 1. The first principle of moralistic therapeutic deism. 1. A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth. That's the first tenet of this, the first rule, the first principle, the first presupposition. A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth. Now beloved, I understand and you understand that that statement standing alone by itself is not problematic because of what it says. There is a sense in which we would agree with that. We believe that there is a God who exists, right? We believe that God created the world. He watches over human life on earth. We would agree with that and so the statement itself is not what's problematic here. What the problem is, where the devastating deception in it, as is so often the case, the problem is not what it says, the problem is what it does not say. This statement leads people to think that there is no difference between the God of the Bible, the god of Islam, the god of Mormonism, or the so-called gods of Mormonism, for those that really understand what Mormonism is saying, any statement like this about God that lets you think that everybody is saying pretty much the same thing about God should immediately clue you in that something is wrong, something is missing, and that is certainly the case here with the god of MTD. The problem is that they leave this god largely undefined. They don't go into detail to say, well, who is this god, and so they're content with the idea that some higher power created the universe; he has some kind of order that governs his creation; he more or less passively watches over everything that happens, but beloved, for us as biblical Christians, for those of us who hunger to know the truth, for those of us who have been born-again by the Spirit of God, that kind of pablum, that kind of baby food is not sufficient. We realize that there are other questions that need to be asked and answered and clarified. We have to be specific. We have to ask the question, "Who is the true God? Who is He really as He really is?"

I don't care, in one sense, this is going to be easily misunderstood, there is a sense in which I don't care what anyone believes God to be. I don't care what the man on the street thinks God is. I'm much more interested in who God really is. Who is he really? That's the question that matters, not your opinion. Who is God if you had never been born? Who is God before you were born, who is God after you are gone? You see, when you view the question that way, then all of a sudden we realize that our opinions really aren't important because there is a transcendent element, there is an eternal permanent aspect to this that has to be answered. It can't rise and fall on the opinions of the man on the street.

Who is the true God, and with that question in mind and with this principle of MTD in mind, I invite you now to turn to the Gospel of John 17. The Gospel of John 17. And as I said last time as you're turning there, the entire stumbling block to the worldview that we have applied the label moralistic therapeutic deism to, the entire stumbling block to MTD is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the problem with this worldview and actually which is another way of saying the words of Christ show that this worldview cannot possibly be true, it cannot possibly be right. He himself is the refutation of this man-made, man-centered, man-glorifying religion, and to know Christ is to reject moralistic therapeutic deism.

In John 17:3, he's praying to his heavenly Father on the eve of his crucifixion and he says this, he says, verse 3,

3 "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

The only true God. There's only one. Now, beloved, that means something to us here in this room. That means something to us at Truth Community Church. It means something to every true Bible-believing Christian and every Bible-teaching true church. Based on that prayer in John 17:3, we immediately see that not just any god, small "g," will do. It's not enough to simply talk about a vague god according to the opinions of men. The true God is the God of the Bible and the God of the Bible is a particular God. There is a defined essence to him. There is a reality about him that excludes any claim to anything else being a god, small "g." You see, beloved, what you and I have to remember as we are interacting with the worldview of those around us, is that the God of the Bible is this: he is the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who was revealed in human flesh in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can't talk about God in vague terms. We have to use John 17:3 as a bit of a springboard, we have to say, "Okay, we've introduced God into the conversation here, who is this God? Who is the true God because there is only One and if your god is someone different than the God that I am proclaiming, then one of us has to be wrong because contradictory views of God cannot both be true." Now I realize in our postmodern culture like ours, you know, this idea of absolute truth, even that's, you know, at a discount, but you and I here in this room, we have to think beyond the mindset of the world and think according to what God has revealed.

There is only one true God and what is this God like? Look at Matthew 28 at the end in verse 18. Just before his ascension, after his resurrection, Jesus came up to his disciples in verse 18 and he said this,

18 ... "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name [singular name] of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Now embedded in what Christ said, central to his teaching commission that he gave to his apostles and which we inherit as the true people of God based on believing in the words of the apostle for eternal life, central to what Christ said is you go out and you proclaim the name, singular, the one name of the one true God, and that God is revealed in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If you are not somehow in the core of what you're teaching proclaiming that the true God is a God who is a Trinity, who is a God of one essence and yet existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you're not proclaiming the true God. You're preaching something that is no god at all. You're preaching the god who is a figment of your imagination. Again, we see that Christ himself becomes the stumbling block over which MTD trips and splatters its face on the concrete in front of it. It can't be true because Christ said when you go out and teach

about God, here's what you go and proclaim, you proclaim his name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and any preaching of a so-called god that doesn't somewhere make large room for that manifestation and those declarations of the truth of God is not the real, is not the one true God to whom Christ prayed, the only God, the one true God.

Look at John 14. Who is this God? John 14:7. Again we come back to the words of Christ and we see what he said 2,000 years ago standing the test of time and declaring and manifesting judgment against the spirit of our age because his words endure, his words will never pass away, his character, his name, his person will never pass away. So we bring everything back to Christ and see what he has to say about it all.

In John 14:7, Christ tells his disciples,

7 "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." 8 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

In other words, he is saying, "You want to know the Father, look at Me. I am the perfect representation of who He is. I share His essence. We are identical in essence. When you see Me, you see what God is like." And so our Lord Jesus Christ is the dividing line, and so if you find yourself engaged in a conversation and it seems like you're talking to someone who is vaguely talking about God, you want to share with them, you want to evangelize with them, go straight to what the issue is and ask them, "Who do you say Jesus Christ is?" Make Christ the issue in these vague conversations about God. "Let's get specific. Let's see what you say about Christ," because that's what Christ asked his disciples. He said, "Who do people say that I am," Mark 8, I believe it is. "Who do people say that I am?" Well, some people say you're Elijah, one of the prophets. But he said, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." So in this mindset, we always bring it back to Christ and we tell people, "You must answer the question who is Jesus Christ? You must answer that question before we have any idea if we're talking about the true God or not." And you bring it back to Christ because he himself is the dividing line.

Go back a couple of chapters, nine to be precise, to John 5:23. Some of these verses are ones that we emphasized in our series on the deity of Christ some time ago. John 5:23. We'll start at verse 22, I guess.

22 "For not even the Father judges anyone [this is Christ speaking], but He has given all judgment to the Son, 23 so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him."

Jesus says, "You must give equal honor to the Son, you must give equal honor to Christ as you do the Father, and if you do not honor the Son like that, you're not honoring God at all. Your worship is false. It is idolatry. It does not matter, no matter what other spiritual platitudes you might voice. If you are not giving supreme highest honor to the Lord Jesus Christ, you are not worshiping the one true God."

John 8:19, the Jews asked Christ, they said,

19 ... "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also."

"You would automatically know the Father if you knew Me, but the fact that you reject Me, you do not honor Me, you do not worship Me," Jesus says, "is an indication that you don't know God at all."

So beloved, this is why when we talk about this first principle of moralistic therapeutic deism, a god exists who created the world, we're not impressed with that statement to the extent that it stops there and people want to leave it there. We, you and I, true Christians, have to press the issue and press the issue so that the subject matter becomes, "But who is Christ? Who is the Christ? What do you say about Him? When you read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, who are you reading about? Is He a mere man? Is He a mere prophet? Or is He God in human flesh, the only Savior given to mankind? You have to answer those questions, my friend." And when you bring the conversation to that realm, you are turning your back on the realm of moralistic therapeutic deism and entering into the realm of what is true as revealed in the Bible, as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

John 14:6,

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

One other verse that I would point you to, 1 John 5:12. You don't need to turn there but all reinforcing this theme about the centrality of Christ. 1 John 5:11,

11 ... the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

Do you see it? Again and again and again Scripture points us to Christ, the only source of eternal life, the one who alone reveals the true and living God, and in such clear stark terms, beloved, in such clear stark terms that we only uphold Scripture when we say this, if a man does not know and bow before the Lord Jesus Christ, he does not know God at all. No matter what other kind of spiritual talk he may make, if Christ is not the center focus of his proclamation, if Christ is not the exclusive object of his trust and his hope for eternal life, if Christ is not his Lord and his Master, as we'll see on Sunday out of the book of Philippians, if those things aren't true, it doesn't matter what other kind of God

talk you're doing. You're just flapping your lips, moving air but not moving heaven. So the one true God is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we can take this another step further. The true God is also distinguished by his sovereignty. He created the universe, yes, but he also sustains it. The whole idea of deism, that God created the world and then just stepped back to let it run itself, is in gross contradiction to what Scripture says the reality of God is. God created the world and he also sustains it.

Look at the book of Acts 17:25, in verse 24. Paul is preaching on Mars Hill and he says,

24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since

This is kind of a long complicated sentence in one sense, but remember he's talking about the God who made the world so that's directly relevant to the point that we're talking about here in MTD. "Since," verse 25,

He Himself [the God who made the world, in other words] gives to all people life and breath and all things... 28 ... in Him we live and move and exist,

And so God not only created the world, he sustains it. People have life. You are here a living, breathing, animate being tonight because God has given you breath to do so. He made you and he gives you breath. He is not remote and inactive and passively watching while you go on as an autonomous creature, your very existence derives from him and he is sovereign over life and death.

In Ephesians 1:11, well, let's turn there. Ephesians 1:11. I'll give you a moment to find it. Ephesians 1:11. He is

11 ... predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

All things after the counsel of his will are being worked out by his sovereign direction. This is a God that is utterly distinct from the presuppositions and the mindset that we've called moralistic therapeutic deism. These two things are completely unrelated to one another. These are mutually exclusive.

In Colossians 1, just turning over a couple of books, short books to your right, Colossians 1, speaking of Christ, again you find Christ, it's as if you're in the midst of this barren landscape, this vague barren landscape that has no definable topical features to distinguish it in your mind, there is just this vague landscape around you and you can't find your bearings, and then when you start to read Scripture, what happens is Christ just powerfully rises up out of that and you see it could be no other way. As you examine



these things, Christ rises in glory while the vague and deliberately ambiguous statements that pulpits and people make about God are shown to be the empty vacuous things that they are.

So in Colossians 1:15 it says,

15 He is the image [speaking of Christ] of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

That doesn't mean that he was created, it means he has the highest preeminence. He is first in all creation.

Verse 16,

16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

So we find that when we're talking about God, we have to get to Christ and talk about Christ, and when we start doing that, we see a great cleavage growing between MTD as it breaks off and starts to float away in the sea and drifts out into oblivion for the false worldview that it is, and separates out from the truth that remains, the truth about God revealed in Christ, revealed in the God who is sovereign over all things.

Pollster George Barna, whose writings and conclusions I rarely agree with but his surveys are helpful, said this in his book "The Second Coming of the Church," published several years ago, he said and I quote, "A majority of people believe that all people pray to the same God or Spirit no matter what name they use for that spiritual being." So if you're praying and I'm praying, we're praying to the same God even though we may use different names and have different conceptions about him. You know, it all ends up in the same place in the end. You know, somehow our prayers mystically rise up to wherever God is and they all get there and arrive at the same destination, and so we're all okay, we're all praying to the same God. Beloved, beloved, that is exactly what's wrong with moralistic therapeutic deism. That is exactly what's wrong with the spirit of our age. That's exactly what's wrong with so much of what passes for Christian teaching in the broader evangelical church today.

A vague belief in God is not enough. This is not true. Has anyone read, I'm not directing this to you, I know you've read it, but has anyone in this room of broad evangelical Christianity, has anyone read James 2:19?

19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

Jews, Christians, Muslims, Mormons, Hindus, we do not believe in the same God. You must believe in the true sovereign God as he is revealed in the 66 books of the Bible, as he is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, or you are not saved. You belong to the devil. You are a son of the father of lies. You are a son and a child of Satan if you don't believe that. So there are just a lot of consequences here.

Now, I realize I'm probably not offending anyone in this room with what I'm saying here tonight, no one in this room, but you know, if someone takes offense at that, that's okay. They need to hear that. It's okay for someone to have a spiritual slap in their face if it would invigorate them and wake them up out of the spiritual slumber that would if not roused out of it, would cause them one day to wake up with their first breath finding themselves in a place of eternal judgment and torment because they tried to come to God through the way of their own choosing rather than the one way that he has given through our Lord Jesus Christ. So I don't care if I offend somebody, I hope I offend a lot of people with what I'm saying here tonight because the offense will show that, yes, now we're starting to connect and now we're starting to communicate, you are understanding enough to realize that what's being said here should offend you if you reject it; that it's a challenge that Christ is a threat to you. People need to understand that Christ is a threat to them if they don't respond to him in humble repentant faith because the one who offers himself as Savior today won't always offer himself that way. The time will come when you'll stand before him as a judge and he will not be amused, and if you do not believe in the one true God, the one sovereign God revealed in Scripture and revealed in the Savior, you are guilty of the highest sin, you are guilty of idolatry because you're worshiping a god of your own choosing, a god that you have made up, a god that is no God at all, and giving honor to a god of your own imagination, you are robbing the true God of the honor that is rightfully his. So that's why we say that it's not enough to say a god exists who created and orders the world, we immediately want to say, "What God are you talking about? What about Jesus Christ, who do you say that He is?" And those kinds of questions lead you in a different direction than the worldview known as moralistic therapeutic deism.

Let's move on to the second point here this evening, the second aspect of this worldview. God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. That's not what I'm saying, I'm quoting it in order to refute it, just to be clear. God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. What would we say about that? Well, moralistic therapeutic deism in this mindset, what you see is that its goal is preeminently behavioral, how you act in human relationships. It's horizontal in its focus. It tells people to be nice, to be tolerant, to be accepting of everything, and it offers a promise that if you're like that, God will ultimately receive you into heaven. So the focus is on being at nice to others in a horizontal way, don't cause offense, don't offend people with what you say. What are we to say about this?

Well, beloved, let me remind you just some real basic things that perhaps we take for granted, but morality is defined by God. Morality is defined in Scripture. It is not defined by popular opinion, what the prevailing sentiment in culture is. Morality is defined by

God. In the worldview of moralistic therapeutic deism, the reality is that for most people in our world today, popular culture is defining what is good, not Scripture, and this is so elusive until you start to nail a few things down. Why is moralistic therapeutic deism so wrong and so dangerous on this very issue? And how could anyone like me stand up and be concerned about a worldview that is telling people to be good and nice to each other? "Let me guess, you're probably opposed to lollipops too, aren't you? And to bunnies, I bet you don't like bunnies either, do you? And dogs, you don't like dogs?" Yeah, I don't, I don't like dogs. Bunnies are okay, dogs, no, I don't like dogs. Amen. Thank you, brother. "How can you be opposed to people being good and nice and tolerant?" Well beloved, here's the deal with this worldview of moralistic therapeutic deism: all of their presuppositions are wrong. There are presuppositions that inform what they're saying and here's what we have to understand and remember biblically, and I'm going to tell you things that are so obvious, that we've emphasized so many times that you'll say, "Oh yeah, of course." Biblically speaking, 7 billion people in the world today, give or take a few hundred million, biblically speaking, not one of them is good. Not one of them is nice because no one meets God's standard. We have to look at this vertically and say what is God's perspective on individuals and upon humanity? And from God's perspective in Romans 3, there is no one who does good, there is no one who seeks for God, there is not even one. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Matthew 5:48, "You shall be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

So there is this standard of perfection, there is this declaration that no one comes close to it, and all of a sudden you realize if that's the case and if everyone has a heart that is naturally evil and wicked, as Jeremiah says, "The heart is desperately sick, who can understand it?" That's the biblical diagnosis of every man, woman and child who has ever lived and ever will live until the return of Christ. Now beloved, realize something then: to tell people that God declares to be evil, fallen and wicked, to tell them to be good is like telling a brick to be ice cream. You are wasting your breath. A leopard cannot change its spots. In fact, Scripture goes so far as to say that even our so-called good works are not pleasing to God at all.

Can I remind you of the book of Isaiah 64? Isaiah 64:6 says,

6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

So even the so-called humanly, from a human perspective things that we do that are comparatively good to the wicked things we see around us, doesn't meet the standard of God. It's all unclean. It's all filthy. And so to have a worldview that just comes in and bypassing Christ, bypassing the Gospel and simply telling people, "Go out and be nice to each other. Go out and be good to one another and accept each other," without bringing the conviction of the word of God and his declaration of the fallen nature of every man, woman and child, and the fact that we all fall short of his glory, without talking about that is to miss the whole point. You cannot be good enough. You are not good enough. The

whole presupposition is that you can be good and Scripture says you cannot be good in yourself. There is no one like that.

Now beloved, let me go a little bit further here and just remind you of something else about it. So MTD is telling people to be good who don't have the nature to be good, but they are also misunderstanding the real demand of God. The idea, all of this horizontal man-centered stuff, it just makes me want to throw up. It is nauseating because this is not the preeminent demand of God, our Creator, our Sustainer, and one day our Judge. That is not the preeminent center of the call of God.

Look at Matthew 22 as I continue to bring you back to familiar Scriptures that we've spoken about in various contexts over the past seven years and hopefully for many more years to come together. What does God really want? What does God want? What is his demand? The idea of MTD is he just wants us to be good and to be nice to each other. That's not it and it's not like Scripture has hidden his will in a corner where it can't be found. It's not like these issues haven't been discussed plainly by Christ while he was on earth.

A man came to him, a lawyer. Verse 36 of Matthew 22 said,

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

What's the most important thing that we could glean from the law as given to us by Moses? Verse 37,

37 And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the great and foremost commandment."

The greatest commandment is that you would give all of your internal allegiance with all of your powers to the one true God revealed in Scripture. That's the great commandment. He says,

39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

But you don't go there, you don't bypass the great commandment to get to the second one. The second one is an outworking of the first.

So this mindset misunderstands the real demand of God. It's vertical. There's accountability to God and not just accountability but there is, what God requires from man is to love him in spirit and in truth, John 4:24. So the demand of God on men is directed toward God first and foremost, and if you're bypassing that, you're missing the whole point.

God does not call men preeminently to be nice, he commands them to be obedient, he commands them to love him and Scripture says that when they do not do that, his righteous wrath is on their disobedient spirit. John 3:36,

36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

And once again, we find Christ stepping into the breach of this abominable worldview and with great power and majesty and authority through his word, asserting his preeminence and the absence of reverence for Christ, the absence of the call of the Gospel, the absence of a focus on the true and sovereign God just becomes so evident by comparison that you realize that this has nothing to do with biblical Christianity. Moralistic therapeutic deism is wrong because it does not see God's holiness, it does not see the preeminence of Christ, and it does not see the sin of man. It is simply an opiate offered to people who simply want to live a self-centered autonomous life without regard for the true demands of God upon their life and affections.

Beloved, God does not sentimentally hope for human goodness to be manifested to other humans. Men do not need to feel better about themselves. Good heavens, good night, that's the last thing we need is for people to have an even more elevated view of themselves than their proud pompous character is already manifesting. Men don't need to feel better about themselves, they need to be born-again. They need to humble themselves before Christ and abandon all of their self-preoccupation, bow before Christ and with the Apostle Paul say, "Lord, what would You have me to do?" To recognize the authority of Christ, the supremacy of Christ, to yield themselves to him in a repentant faith that is the call upon every one of you here in this room as well.

So beloved, we do not hesitate to say that the spirit of our age is an unrighteous false religion. We realize in saying that that we set ourselves in opposition to many professing churches. We make no apology for that because the honor and the glory of God compels us to do no less, and the need of lost souls compels us to do no less. So we teach them the nature of God and that they fall short of his glory, and then we have the joy of telling them about Christ. We have the joy to tell people about an all-sufficient Savior whose righteousness and shed blood address their true need, not to feel better but to have their objective guilt before a holy God removed and a pure righteousness given to them as a gift that they can alone receive by faith in Christ. And we tell people not that you need to feel better or that you can feel better, instead we take it to a whole other realm, a much better, a much higher realm, and we promise people on the authority of the word of God that they may have forgiveness of sin and eternal life through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Not a man-centered perspective limited to a few brief years on this earth and feeling good about ourselves, the true message of Scripture, the true message of the Gospel elevates our thoughts to a higher realm, says something completely different about the nature of man, and says, "Here is your need. Christ is your need. You need Christ. You must be saved. Come to Christ and be saved."

So I ask you, do you hold to the spirit of this age or to Christ? May God send his Spirit upon our efforts individually and collectively as we seek to uphold truth in this dark and dying world.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we approach You this evening alone through our Lord Jesus Christ. We deny any righteousness of our own. We deny earth-centered thinking and we pray that by grace, Father, You would help us understand and discern these things that we might be effective ambassadors for Christ. We thank You for the work of the Spirit of God who opened our eyes and opened our hearts to believe these things at some point in the past, who brought Christ to us with power through Your word. Father, we take no credit for our salvation, we give all of the glory to You, and in saying these things of which we have been speaking these past two weeks, O God, it's simply our desire to uphold Your truth, to be loyal to You, that perhaps You might somehow bless our church and us as we understand these things and declare them to others, that You might be pleased to attend faithfulness to Your word and to make us instruments by which Your Spirit brings others to a saving knowledge of Christ. Father, we realize that our voices are few but, Father, when the voice is premised on the truth of Your word, then we take courage and we say we can be Gideon with 300 and go and conquer armies in the truth and in the name of our God as Your Spirit supplies His power to that end. So Father, help us not to be intimidated by the spirit of our age but rather ever to be true to Christ and true to Your blessed word. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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