# CRITICAL RACE THEORY
## A Position Paper

Stonegate Fellowship 2021

**Table of Contents**

## A. Understanding Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory is an area of analysis that emerged out of Critical legal studies in the 1980s. Both of these schools of thought emerged from within the school of Critical Theory, which has its ideological roots in the Frankfurt school of Germany. Much has been written about these ideological roots that is helpful to explore in order to gain an accurate understanding. As one author notes:

> Critical theory is a set of beliefs or ideas that is foundational to many different disciplines in the humanities: Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy, Feminist Studies, Anthropology, Literary Criticism. It's also the ideology at the heart of large segments of the secular, social justice movement. Like any broad philosophical movement, critical theory can be hard to define.[1]

In both ideology and practice, Critical Theory can function as a worldview by which to analyze levels of oppression along different lines. In one popular introduction to Critical Theory, the authors write:

> A critical approach to social justice refers to specific theoretical perspectives that recognize that society is *stratified* (i.e. divided and unequal) in significant and far-reaching ways along social group lines that include race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. Critical social justice recognizes inequality as deeply embedded in the fabric of society (i.e. as structural), and actively seeks to change this. The definition we apply is rooted in a critical theoretical approach.[2]

When it comes to Critical *Race* Theory (CRT) these insights are applied uniquely to the intersection of race in society. Pat Sawyer observes:

> Concisely put, CRT challenges and interrogates the ways in which race, racism, and racial power (with particular emphasis on an expanded definition of white supremacy) are constructed and reified, specifically in legal culture, and more broadly, in society. CRT borrows insight from the Marxism of Antonio Gramsci, utilizes aspects of the Neo-Marxism of historic Critical Theory while challenging others, finds its most immediate roots in critical legal studies (CLS) but also departs and expands from it, and draws epistemological inspiration from historic luminaries such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner Truth.[3]

Much has been written in attempts to both understand, explain, and critique Critical Theory from a Christian perspective.[4] In what follows we want to identify fundamental principles many critical theorists holds to in order to create a baseline for understanding and evaluating their work.

*An Important Disclaimer:* Not all critical theorists agree on every point. Some have cautioned that we shouldn't speak about "Critical *Theory*" as much as we speak about "critical t*heorists.*" There is wisdom in this caution. At the same time, there is a substantial body of literature from critical theorists that provide insights into several unifying principles held by many theorists across multiple disciplines. It is these unifying principles and tenants that, when taken together, constitute what is frequently often labeled as "Critical Theory." In our attempt to rightly understand and respond to this body of literature and its claims, we've outlined the following core principles from the writings of various critical theorists.

---

[1] Neil Shenvi, "Christianity and Critical Theory, Part1" *ShenviApologetics*

[2] Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?*, xx.

[3] Pat Sawyer, "What is CRT and Should we Be Concerned? Part 1" *Christianity Today,* March 3, 2021.

[4] Neil Shenvi has done the most extensive work on this. See his excellent resource page on his website. See also the very helpful (and free!) ebook by Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, *Engaging Critical Theory and the Social Justice Movement*. This booklet goes into a detail about the history, assumptions, merits, and flaws of Critical Theory. Available for free download at https://ratiochristi.org/engaging-critical-theory-and-the-social-justice-movement/#download

## B.  Some Fundamental Principles of Critical Theory[5]

### 1.  Human relationships are primarily understood in terms of social power.

> *Hegemony* refers to the control of the ideology of society. *The dominant group maintains power by imposing their ideology on everyone.…Power in the context of understanding social justice refers to the ideological, technical, and discursive elements by which those in authority impose their ideas and interests on everyone. … From a critical social justice perspective, privilege is defined as systemically conferred dominance and the institutional processes by which the beliefs and values of the dominant group are 'made normal' and universal….*Because dominant groups occupy the positions of power, their members receive social and institutional advantages; *thus one automatically receives privilege by being a member of a dominant group (e.g. cis[gender]-men, Whites, heterosexuals, the able-bodied, Christians, upper classes).*" — Sensoy and DiAngelo[6]

> "Critical scholars define *racism* as a systemic relationship of unequal power between White people and peoples of Color. *Whiteness refers to the specific dimensions of racism that elevates White people over all peoples of Color."* — Sensoy and DiAngelo[7]

> "The cultural system of meanings, values, behavioral norms and interpretations of reality express the identity of the society, regulate conduct and maintain its cohesion integration, much as Durkheim said about religion. But…*the values of every society are shaped by the interests of the ruling classes in such ways that ultimately sustain their power"* – Lauren Langman[8]

### 2.  Oppression is the default mode of all human relationships.

> "[People should] work from the knowledge that *the societal default is oppression;* there are no spaces free of it. Thus, the question becomes, 'How is it manifesting here?' rather than 'Is it manifesting here?'" — Sensoy and DiAngelo[9]

> "Antiracist education recognizes racism as embedded in *all aspects of society and the socialization process;* no one who is born into and raised in Western culture can escape being socialized to participate in racist relations. Antiracist education seeks to interrupt these relations by educating people to identify, name, and challenge the norms, patterns, traditions, ideologies, structures, and institutions that keep racism in place… To accomplish this, we must challenge the dominant conceptualization of racism as individual acts that only some bad individuals do, rather than as *a system in which we are all implicated.* Using a structural definition of racism allows us to explore our own relationship to racism as a system and to move *beyond isolated incidents and/or intentions"* — Sensoy and DiAngelo[10]

---

[5] For the sake of brevity, we've combined quotations about Critical Theory in general with Critical Race Theory in particular.

[6] *Is Everyone Really Equal?* 73, 80, 81

[7] *Is Everyone Really Equal?* 142

[8] Lauren Langman, "From Domination to Liberation: Marcuse, Gramsci, and a Critical Theory of Social Mobilization", 12; *Conference Papers  American Sociological Association*

[9] *Is Everyone Really Equal?*, 203

[10] *Is Everyone Really Equal?,* 142

In its new usage, oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but *because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society… Oppression in this sense is structural,* rather than the result of a few people's choices or policies. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols."— Iris Young[11]

*"Racism…, Sexism,…Ageism. Heterosexism. Elitism. Classism.* It is a *lifetime pursuit* for each one of us to extract these distortions from our living" — Audre Lorde[12]

"[A] positive white identity is an impossible goal. *White identity is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy.* This does not mean that we should stop identifying as white and start claiming only to be Italian or Irish. To do so is to deny the reality of racism in the here and now, and this denial would simply be color-blind racism. Rather, I strive to be 'less white.*' To be less white is to be less racially oppressive."* – Robin DiAngelo.[13]

*"[W]hiteness is like the air that you breathe when you live in a polluted city* — where you get taught that pollution has no negative impact…And like pollution, whiteness is treated like it's healthy, normal, and comes with no consequences… That's why *we need white people to heal from their unconscious attachment to whiteness*…So you can reconnect to your humanity outside of whiteness and co-create an anti-oppressive community of care and consent around yourself." – Sandra Kim[14]

"[I]f you live in this system of White Supremacy you are either fighting the system, or you are complicit. There is no neutrality to be had towards systems of injustice — it is not something you can just opt out of… [I]f you are white in a white supremacist society, you are racist. If you are male in a patriarchy, you are sexist. If you are able-bodied, you are ableist. If you are anything above poverty in a capitalist society, you are classist. You can sometimes be all of these things at one. — Ijeoma Oluo[15]

### 3. **A person's level of oppression determines their access to truth and their level of cultural authority.**

For critical theorists, a person's social location means everything in terms of their ability to know what's true or false. In this way, Critical Theorists employ the analytical framework of "Intersectionality" (sometimes called "Positionality").

This framework was originally developed by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw. For Krenshaw, a person's level of oppression operates at the intersection of their various group identities. For example: a black woman experiences more levels of oppression in virtue of her blackness and femininity than, say, a black man, because he only shares in one level of oppression (i.e. blackness).

In practice, this leads some to conclude that knowledge is incredibly subjective and the pursuit of objective truth is rendered almost (if not completely) meaningless. Because intersectionality locates truth within the subjective experience of the individual, the idea of a transcendent, objective truth makes little

---

[11] Iris Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice,* 36

[12] Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", *Race, Class, and Gender: An* Anthology, 496

[13] *White Fragility*, 149-150

[14] "Healing from Internalized Whiteness", *Everyday Feminism Organization.*

[15]*So You Want to Talk About Race*, 211, 216–217.

sense.In fact, any claims to objective truth could in fact be a tool of oppression used to silence or oppress the lived experience of the oppressed. Consider the following quotations:

> "*Intersectionality* is the idea that identity cannot be fully understood via a single lens such as gender, race, or class alone — what legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) called a 'single axis framework'….*our socialization is the foundation of our identity.* Thus to consider that we have been socialized to participate in systems of oppression that we don't condone is to challenge our very sense of who we are." … *Critical theory challenges the claim that any knowledge is neutral or objective, and outside of humanly constructed meanings and interests."* — Sensoy and DiAngelo[16]

> "Positionality asserts that knowledge is dependent upon a complex web of cultural values, beliefs, experiences, and social positions…who we are (as knowers) is intimately connected to our group socialization (including gender, race, class, and sexuality)… '*what you know' is connected to 'who you are' and 'where you stand.'"* — Sensoy and DiAngelo[17]

> "Dominant groups have the *most narrow or limited view* of society because they do not have to understand the experiences of the minoritized group in order to survive.. Minoritized groups often have the *widest view of society,* in that they must understand both their own and the dominant group's perspective — develop a double-consciousnes—to succeed" — Sensoy and DiAngelo[18]

> "Our inability to think with complexity about racism, as well as our investment in it, *makes Whites the least qualified to assess its manifestations…* Very few Whites believe that structural racism is real or have the humility to engage with peoples of Color about it in an open and thoughtful way." — Sensoy and DiAngelo[19]

> "*The idea that objectivity is best reached only through rational thought is a specifically Western and masculine way of thinking…"* – Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins[20]

## 4. A member of an oppressed group cannot be guilty of certain types of oppression, because they are not part of the oppressive group that perpetuates that specific injustice

> "Black people can't be racist. Prejudiced, yes, but not racist. *Racism describes a system of disadvantage based on race.* Black people can't be racist since we don't stand to benefit from such a system." — From the Film: "Dear White People," 2014.

> "People of color are not racist because they do not systematically benefit from racism… Using the same logic, I reserve the word *sexist* for men" — Beverly Daniel Tatum[21]

---

[16] *Is Everyone Really Equal?,* 139, 175, 185, 187

[17] *Is Everyone Really Equal?*, 29–30

[18] *Is Everyone Really Equal?,* 70

[19] *Is Everyone Really Equal?* 149

[20]"Reconstructing Knowledge," in Anderson and Collins, *Race, Class, and Gender*, 4-5

[21] Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together at the Cafeteria?*, 10.

### 5. A person's group identity is ultimate to their self-understanding

"People [in the US] are commonly defined as other on the basis of race or ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and physical or mental ability. *Each of these categories has a form of oppression associated with it:* racism, sexism, religious oppression/anti-Semitism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, and ableism, respectively. In each case, there is a group considered dominant (systematically advantaged by the society because of group membership) and a group considered subordinate or targeted (systematically disadvantaged)." — Beverly Tatum[22]

"Individualism holds that we are each unique and stand apart from others, even those within our social groups…*Setting aside your sense of uniqueness is a critical skill that will allow you to see the big picture of the society in which we live; individualism will not"* — Robin DiAngelo.[23]

### 6. Injustice is frequently described in terms of social disparities.

Here's an example of racial inequity: 71 percent of White families lived in owner-occupied homes in 2014, compared to 45 percent of Latinx families and 41 percent of Black families. Racial equity is when two or more racial groups are standing on a relatively equal footing. An example of racial equity would be if there were relatively equitable percentages of [Whites, Latinx, and Blacks] living in owned-occupied homes…A racist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups…. Racist policies have been described by other terms: 'institutional racism,' 'structural racism,' and 'systemic racism.' But those are vaguer terms than 'racist policy'…. 'Racist policy' says exactly what the problem is and where the problem is… Racism itself is institutional, structural, and systemic" — Ibram X. Kendi[24]

"When you truly believe that the racial groups are equal, then you also believe that racial disparities must be the result of racial discrimination" — Ibram X. Kendi[25]

[R]acism refers to White racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination, supported by institutional power and authority, used to the advantage of Whites and the disadvantage of peoples of Color. Racism encompasses economic, political, social, and institutional actions and beliefs that perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power between White people and peoples of Color**.** — Sensoy and DiAngelo[26]

### 7. Social Justice requires the liberation of oppressed groups through the deconstructing of institutions of power and privilege.

"These political times call for renewed dialogue about and commitment to the politics of liberation…Liberation requires a struggle against discrimination based on race, class, gender, sexual identity, ableism and age" — Suzanne Pharr[27]

---

[22] Beverly Tatum, "The Compexity of Identity: 'Who Am I?'", *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice, 11*

[23] *White Fragility*, 9, 13

[24] *How to be An AntiRacist,* 18

[25]*Stamped From the Beginning,* 11.

[26] *Is Everyone Really Equal?* 228

[27] Suzanne Pharr, "Reflections on Liberation," in Adams et. al,. *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, p.

"The roots of visionary feminism extend back to the early sixties [when] women's liberation movement visionary thinkers were dreaming about a radical/revolutionary political movement that would… grant women civil rights within the existing white supremacist capitalist patriarchal system while simultaneously working to undermine and overthrow the system" — bell hooks[28]

"Prior to celebrating diversity, we must first eliminate intolerance. No matter what form it takes or who does it, we must all take action to stop intolerance when it happens. Working towards a celebration of diversity implies working for *social justice – the elimination of all forms of social oppression*… Social injustice takes many forms. It can be injustice based on a person's gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, or economic class." – Mary McClintock[29]

---

[28] bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 110

[29] Mary McClintock, "How to Interrupt Oppressive Behavior," *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, 483

## C. What Critical Theory Gets Right

Before moving on to a critique of Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory, it's important that we establish some important principles for interpreting secular ideas. First, the Bible is clear that we must not be taken captive to philosophies that are contrary to the truths of Scripture (Colossians 2:8; 1 John 2:13–15; 4:1–7). This happens when we let their principles become the primary lens through which we view the world.

At the same time, we must hold the Bible's warning to not be taken captive by false ideas in tension with the biblical truth of Common Grace—the fact that God gives grace to lost people and that this grace evidences itself in truthful ideas across a variety of intellectual disciplines. Theologian Wayne Grudem observes:

> The common grace of God in the intellectual realm … results in an ability to grasp truth and distinguish it from error, and to experience growth in knowledge that can be used in the investigation of the universe and in the task of subduing the earth [Genesis 2]. This means that all science and technology carried out by non-Christians is a result of common grace, allowing them to make incredible discoveries and inventions, to develop the earth's resources into many material goods, and to produce and distribute those resources, and to have skill in their productive work. In the practical sense, this means that every time we walk into a grocery store or ride in an automobile or enter a house we should remember that we are experiencing the results of the abundant common grace of God poured out so richly on mankind.[30]

This is consistent with many passages in Scripture. For example:

> The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands. Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge. — Psalm 19:1–2

> Wisdom calls out in the street; she makes her voice heard in the public squares. She cries out above the commotion; she speaks at the entrance of the city gates "How long, inexperienced ones, will you love ignorance? How long will you mockers enjoy mocking and you fools hate knowledge? — Proverbs 1:20–22

All of this to say: we must not "throw the baby out with the bathwater" when we consider the claims of any particular worldview or ideology. Instead, we must be willing to separate the specific claims from their origin and consider each claim on its own merit. When we do this, we can appreciate the insights from various people who are not Christians, while at the same time rejecting the worldview or philosophy from which they come. Given the fact that all people are still created in Gods image and imbued with various reasoning faculties, we shouldn't be surprised when non-Christians provide unique insight on a specific truth in God's creation. In so far as they do, we should embrace such claims, while at the same time measuring everything by the Bible and rejecting what is not consistent with its teachings.

Christian philosophers J.P. Moreland and Francis Beckwith point to the example of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement who spoke to a group of ministers in 1756. They observe:

> Time and again throughout the address Wesley unpacked this remark [that clergy should possess the ability to think logically] by admonishing ministers to know what would sound truly odd and almost pagan to the average congregant of today: logic, metaphysics, natural theology, geometry and the ideas of important figures in the history of philosophy.  For Wesley, study in these areas (especially philosophy and geometry) helped train the mind to think precisely, a habit of incredible value, he asserted, when it comes to thinking as a Christian about theological themes or scriptural texts. . . . As he put it elsewhere, 'To imagine none can teach you but those who are

---

[30] *Systematic Theology*, 659–660.

themselves saved from sin is a very great and dangerous mistake. Give not place to it for a moment.'[31]

Moreland and Beckwith also observe how this use of extra biblical knowledge is something practiced by the writers of Scripture, giving us biblical precedent for utilizing "outside ideas" and repurposing them for biblical ends.

> In valuing extrabiblical knowledge, our brothers and sisters in church history were merely following common sense and Scripture itself.  Repeatedly, Scripture acknowledges the wisdom of cultures outside Israel; for example, Egypt (Acts 7:22; cf. Ex 7:11), the Edomites (Jer 49:7), the Phoenicians (Zech 9:2), and many others. The remarkable achievements produced by human wisdom are acknowledged in Job 28:1-11.  The wisdom of Solomon is compared to the wisdom of the "people of the east" and Egypt in order to show that Solomon's wisdom surpassed that of people with a longstanding, well-deserved reputation for wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34).  Paul approvingly quotes pagan philosophers (Acts 17:28), and Jude does the same thing with the noncanonical book *The Assumption of Moses* (Jude 9).  The book of Proverbs is filled with examples in which knowledge, even moral and spiritual knowledge, can be gained from studying things in the natural world (ants, for example).[32]

Because "all truth is God's truth," we should willingly embrace anything critical theorists get right, while at the same time rejecting anything that is not in agreement with Scripture. We must not reject elements of truth discovered by non-Christian sources. Where critical theorists make an accurate claims we should acknowledge this with a clear conscience. With this in mind, Neil Shenvi offers three areas of agreement between Scripture and Critical Theory:

> First, the greatest strength of critical theory is its recognition that oppression is evil. The Bible is emphatic in its condemnation of oppression in both the Old and New Testaments.  Jesus himself is described as 'oppressed and afflicted'; God identifies with suffering people and commands his followers to seek justice on their behalf.

> Second, critical theory's focus on groups rather than on individuals provides insight into how laws and institutions can promote sin. Take chattel slavery in the U.S. or the Holocaust or apartheid in South Africa. Clearly, these horrors shouldn't be exclusively understood as individual acts of immorality. In all of these examples, immorality was codified and written into law. The law then informed and shaped human moral intuitions, as it always does. Human beings were individually morally responsible for their actions, but laws and institutions and systems dramatically amplified the effects of human wickedness.

> Third, hegemonic power does exist and it can have an insidious effect on our norms and values. Here's an example that will resonate with conservatives: think about how Hollywood and Madison Avenue define standards of beauty and sexuality. Think about how hard we have to work as Christian parents to teach our children that women are not sex objects and that real beauty is internal, not merely external. The way in which the entertainment and advertising industries shape how we understand human value is an example of hegemonic power with respect to beauty.[33]

---

[31] J.P. Moreland and Francis Beckwith, "Forward" to *Philosophy as a Christian* by Garrett J. DeWeese, 14.

[32] Ibid. 14.

[33] "Christianity and Critical Theory, Part 1," *ShenviApologetics*

Along the lines of this third point, the Bible acknowledges that real power dynamics are at work within human relationships. For example, Scripture acknowledges that people in authority have unique levels of responsibility, power, and influence over the people they lead (James 3:1–12; Hebrews 13:17). Moreover Scripture acknowledges that the poor are especially vulnerable to the rich, because the rich have a unique status within a community to exploit them (Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 15:7).

In fact, God hates it when leaders use their power to exploit people (Jeremiah 2; Amos 2; Micah 3), God Himself even uses His position of power to defend the cause of the poor and the needy (Jeremiah 22:16), because God understands the power dynamics at work that keep the poor from having fair representation and treatment. Consider the following passages:

> The word of the Lord came to Zechariah: "The Lord of Armies says this: 'Make fair decisions. Show faithful love and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the resident alien or the poor, and do not plot evil in your hearts against one another.' But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder; they closed their ears so they could not hear. They made their hearts like a rock so as not to obey the law or the words that the Lord of Armies had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. Therefore intense anger came from the Lord of Armies. Just as he had called, and they would not listen, so when they called, I would not listen, says the Lord of Armies. I scattered them with a windstorm over all the nations that had not known them, and the land was left desolate behind them, with no one coming or going. They turned a pleasant land into a desolation." — Zechariah 7:8–14

> The Lord says: I will not relent from punishing Israel for three crimes, even four, because they sell a righteous person for silver and a needy person for a pair of sandals. They trample the heads of the poor on the dust of the ground and obstruct the path of the needy. A man and his father have sexual relations with the same girl, profaning my holy name. — Amos 2:6–7

A fourth point we would add to the list of things Critical Theory gets right is that as an analytical tool, Intersectionality brings some unique and valuable insights into the world of people's experiences. We do not believe Intersectionality or Critical Theory's employment of it are helpful as totalizing ideological frameworks. Nevertheless, we do believe it's true to say, for example, a black woman and a black man will experience the world differently and even, experience oppression and privilege differently. As Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff observe:

> Intersectionality is a theory based on several insights that we believe are valid and useful: power matters, members of groups sometimes act cruelly or unjustly to preserve their power, and people who are members of multiple identity groups can face various forms of disadvantage in ways that are often invisible to others. [34]

All of this is meant to illustrate that critical theorists are not wrong to identify power-dynamics at work within human relationships. On this point, there is clear biblical overlap with the basic concept. Critical Theory gets many things wrong here as well, but this should not be a reason for us to reject altogether the notion of unique experiences being tied to power relationships.

A final point we believe critical theorists get right is their understanding and emphasis of the historic racism in predominantly white, American culture. Much has been written on this topic that is not unique to Critical Theory. Nevertheless, critical theorists are right to point out the historic oppression associated with people of color at the hands of a majority white culture. Historian Jemar Tisby speaks of one example of this that took place in Mississippi 1904:

---

[34] *The Coddling of the American Mind*, 68.

> The lynching … was planned for … a Sunday afternoon after church so a larger crowd could gather. The murderers strategically chose their location for maximum intimidation of the black populace…. More than a thousand people showed up to gawk at the lynching of Luther and Mary Holbert. The lynchers tied up the Holberts and commenced with 'the most fiendish tortures.' First, the white murderers cut off each of the fingers and toes of their victims and gave them out as souvenirs. Then they beat the bodies of Luther and Mary so mercilessly that one of Luther Holbert's eyes dangled from its socket… 'The most excruciating form of punishment consisted in the use of a large corkscrew in the hands of some of the mob. This instrument was bored into the flesh of the man and woman, in the arms, legs, and body, and then pulled out.'… They burned Mary first, so Luther could see his beloved killed. Then they burned him.[35]

What was the legal response to this? Tisby continues:

> Woods Eastland, who led the mob that lynched the Holberts, did face charges in the murders, but his acquittal was a foregone conclusion. After the all-white jury found him innocent, Eastland hosted a party on his plantation to celebrate.[36]

Such an account is horrifying, especially when one considers it take place "after church" within a church context. Such practices are appalling and have no place among followers of Jesus and should be condemned for the grave injustices that they are. On this point, we agree with historians and critical theorists: America's history contains some horrible examples of injustice perpetuated through chattel slavery and Jim Crow laws. This doesn't mean America is purely evil or unjust by nature, but only that it's history contains a complex account of both good and evil characterized by both righteousness and injustice at different points.

Insofar as Critical Theory affirms the truths that are inline with Scripture, we should be happy to acknowledge this. The Bible is clear that God speaks to all people through creation and their conscience (Psalm 19:1–2; Romans 2:14–16). As such, we should not be surprised when non-believers discover and express ideas that are true. They live in God's world and are created in Gods image. Even though they are sinful and without Christ, their logical and reasoning faculties have not been so affected so as to prevent them from arriving at true and valid conclusions.

With all of this in mind, we must also recognize that Scripture is the ultimate authority by which we measure what is true, right, and good. When we look at Critical Theory through the lens of Scripture, it's clear that Critical Theory gets somethings right, but it also gets many things wrong. When it comes to the subject of race in particular, we believe that Critical Race Theory offers a completely different worldview with various assumptions, principles, and practices that are at odds with the Christian faith and the unity Jesus gave His life to establish.

In what follows, we provide ten points of critique. We've limited most of our critique to areas where Critical Theory is at odds with clear and obvious biblical principles. However, we do reference and utilize the insights of scholars in relevant fields in order to bolster our case and apply various insights that are consistent with biblical teaching.

---

[35] Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 107.

[36] Ibid. 108.

## D. A Critique of Critical Theory

**1. The Bible does not define human relationships primarily or exclusively in terms of social power—especially in the Church.**

While the Bible certainly recognizes the various power-dynamics across human relationships, it provides other categories by which to understand people and systems. In comparison to Critical Theory that understands the world entirely in terms of power, the Bible provides a more robust understanding of the world by providing multiple categories by which to understand human relationships. For Example:

- **Truth:** It's clear from the writings of critical theorists that power holds the prominent place in understanding human persons and relationships. The Bible, by contrast, tells us that truth is more important than power, because the truth will set us free from the power of sin and darkness—no matter what form it may take (John 8:32; Ephesians 6:10–18). In human relationships, the fundamental question is not: who's in power?" but rather, "what's *true*?" In this way, the Bible isn't concerned primarily with power, but rather with what's true about each individual person. Power is a secondary factor, not a primary factor. Moreover, we can't actually discover who's in power unless there is such a thing as objective truth—something that critical theorists call into question because of their emphasis on the lived experiences of the oppressed (see below). Finally, the Bible tells us that truth is not just a concept, but a person named Jesus (John 14:6). Ironically, in Jesus we see the beauty of truth *and* power working together to bring about true freedom and liberation for the oppressed (Isaiah 61:1–3).

- **Love:** In the Bible, love is the ultimate virtue—the spring from which every other virtue flows (1 Corinthians 13:1–13; Colossians 3:12–17). As such, a more fundamental question for relationships is not, "Who's in power?" but rather, "Is this relationship *loving*?" The Bible recognizes the various dynamics of power within human relationships, but it does not reduce human relationships to this factor. Instead, it assumes that power can be used either for good or for evil. As such, there must be something besides power that can adjudicate between good relationships and evil relationships. Love does this, because love enables us to know the *quality* and *value* of the various power relationships we experience (i.e. in a marriage, in a classroom, in a job, in a church, etc.). When every human relationship is reduced to power, the beauty and color that love provides is diminished and relationships become redefined according to levels of oppression and privilege. This distorts and destroys the capacity for genuine love and community, especially in the church.

Critical Theory's concern with power dynamics ultimately flattens human relationships and reduces them to their levels of oppression and privilege. This robs life of its beauty, creating a myopic lens through which to view every relationship. As a result, we stop seeing individual people and instead see only group-representatives. In the process, we minimize individual and personal factors related to the person's character that are essential to understanding who they are. This causes us to obscure the individual factors unique to each person, because we are so focused upon their group or social identity.

This is especially problematic in the church. In Christ, we are no longer seen primarily through our power-relationships. Instead, we are primarily seen through our common identity in Christ—the one who has both all the power and all the privilege, yet chose to lay these aside for us (Philippians 2:5–11). In Him, we are simultaneously the most powerful people on earth (Romans 8:11), yet at the same time called to be the most lowly and humble (1 Peter 5:6). Ultimately, we are no longer defined primarily by our power-relationships to each other, but rather by our new relationship in Christ. Consider the following passages:

From now on, then, we do not know anyone from a worldly perspective. Even if we have known Christ from a worldly perspective, yet now we no longer know him in this way. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! — 2 Corinthians 5:16–17

For since there is envy and strife among you, are you not worldly and behaving like mere humans? For whenever someone says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not acting like mere humans? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, and each has the role the Lord has given. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So, then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. — 1 Corinthians 3:3–7[37]

In each of these passages, the apostle Paul is exhorting early Christians to *not* understand themselves primarily in terms of their social power and status. In the church, there is no room for a "worldly perspective" that over-emphasizes race, class, or gender. Moreover, there is no room for competing factions of people who jockey for position based upon their group affiliation (i.e. with Paul or Apollos). Such group allegiance creates "envy and strive among you," threatening the unity Christ calls us to (Ephesians 4:1–3).

While the natural human tendency is to define ourselves this way, The Scriptures insist we must not do this. Instead, we must relate to each other as fellow image bearers and in the church, as family members who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. In the passages above, Paul insists we define ourselves primarily in terms of who we are in Christ. Critical Theory requires us to understand human relationships primarily in terms of their power-dynamics; but the Bible teaches us to do the exact opposite. What Critical Theory requires, Scripture explicitly forbids.

## 2.  An Obsession with Social Power and Oppression Would Destroy Christian Unity

This point is related to the first, but it's worth a separate point of criticism. We can easily speak like power and oppression are new categories or experiences unique to modern life, but the exact opposite is true. For as long as there have been humans there has been power and oppression. This was especially true in the first century Roman world when, as some historians estimate, between one-fourth and one-third of the people were in slavery.[38]

Whether it was slavery, excessive taxation, unjust punishment for crimes, or inhumane treatment of people, the world Jesus entered into was one full of oppression and injustice. This world was also full of various tribal groups harboring centuries-long hatred that traversed ethnic, political, and religious lines.

Power, oppression, injustice, and group identities—some of the core elements that Critical Theory uses to promote its vision of justice—were all present and pervasive in the world of the first century. In light of this fact, Scott David Allen observes:

We…have to be careful not to categorically view representatives of powerful, often oppressive systems as irredeemably evil. God shows His love to such people throughout the Scripture. Jesus sought out and forgave Zachaeus, a hated collector and traitorous agent of the powerful, cruel, and oppressive Roman Empire. He befriended Nicodemus, a powerful member of the Sanhedrin that eventually condemned Him to death. He even chose Cornelius, a powerful Roman soldier, to

---

[37] Just in case it's not entirely clear, Paul is arguing here that someone is not more important or authoritative by virtue of their human group affiliation ("Baptized by Paul" or "Baptized by Apollos").  Instead, our value, status, and authority are derived from our status in Christ and Christ alone.

[38] Mark Cartwright, "Slavery in the Roman World," *World History Encyclopedia Online*, November 1, 2013.

be among the first Christians, commanding Peter to welcome him into the fledgling, largely Jewish church. If God can extend His grace to people who are apart of oppressor groups, so should we.[39]

When we come to the New Testament letters, the apostle Paul picks up on this reality and says:

> For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus.— Galatians 3:27–28

> In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all. — Colossians 2:11

In these verses, Paul calls out the primary group identities the early Christians once identified with apart from Christ. In doing so, he also evoked the levels and history of privilege and oppression that existed— and could've remained—apart from the blood of Jesus. But in these verses, Paul establishes a new group identity that is no longer based on lived experiences, but rather on the objective work of Jesus Christ.

Practically, this meant the Jews couldn't leverage their history of oppression under the Romans to gain any group advantage or justify their grievances. Likewise, the Gentiles couldn't use the theological privilege of the Jewish people (because they had the Old Testament) to accuse them of historic, systemic oppression or racism. Instead, every grievance and level of oppression was nailed to the cross of Christ. This is why Paul says explicitly:

> For he is our peace, who made both groups one and *tore down the dividing wall of hostility.* In his flesh, he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, *resulting in peac*e. He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body *through the cross* by which *he put the hostility to death.* — Ephesians 2:14–16

This is a completely different approach than the one provided by Critical Theory. Under Critical Theory, each of these groups would've been required to identify the ways in which the dominant group had been oppressing the less-dominant group and create an alternative system for deconstructing the norms, behaviors, and ideas of the dominant group. Practically, this would have further emphasized the earthly group identities—creating further division and hostility. Thaddeus Williams observes:

> Here's what Paul and the first century evangelists did *not* do. They did not play a game of grievances. First century Jews could have easily said, "Look at all the oppression the non-Jews have unleashed on us! We've been oppressed by Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and now Romans. They banished us from Rome nearly two hundred years ago and tried again thirty years ago. Romans have invaded and now occupy Jerusalem, our most sacred city. Their economic system of mass taxation has left most of our fellow Jews languishing in poverty. The whole system is rigged against us by the Roman supremacists, enforcing their cultural hegemony on us at every turn. And we're supposed to break bread with them and call them brothers? No way! They must prove their spiritual merit and solidarity with us by becoming 'Judaized' and divesting themselves of their Roman-ness.

> Paul would have non of this. Paul does not say to the non-Jews, 'Look at all the horrors your ancestors unleashed on the Jews." He does not say, 'Jewish believers wake up to the fact that the gentiles have long oppressed you and that they are presently benefitting from all that injustice.' Paul does not treat people like what Thomas Sowell calls 'intertemporal abstractions' of their ethnic identity groups, then pit one group against another in tribal warfare. That would be like

---

[39] *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice,* 81.

rigging explosives to the foundations of the temple that is God's church. And it would demolish the gospel itself, giving people a way of feeling justified and free of blame on the basis of ethnic identity in an oppressed group rather than on the finished work of Jesus. Paul cared far too much about the church and the gospel to split believers into such oppressor/oppressed binaries.[40]

In short: Critical Theory would've destroyed the unity of the early church.[41] Jesus' work on the cross created a new group, a new people who are now united in Him. This new identity in Christ *doesn't erase or irradiate our earthly group identities*, but *it subordinates them to the higher group identity we share in Christ.* On the basis of His finished work, true racial reconciliation was accomplished in the early church—becoming a witness to the watching world about the power of Christ to unite a divided people.

If we want to experience true unity and racial reconciliation, then we must believe the gospel is both necessary and sufficient for the task and then lean into the broken relationships that can be healed through the power of Christ.

3. **Critical Theorists tend to view power relationships as intrinsically negative and oppressive. The Bible has the opposite view—power is intrinsically good and productive. It can be a tool of oppression, but it is not inherently oppressive.**

When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden, He gave them a unique position of power above every other creature. Moreover, God gave them a creative mandate to have dominion over the Earth to cultivate its resources and rule over it with love and care. Notice what God says specifically:

> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female. God blessed them, and God said to them, "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. — Genesis 1:26–28

The key point to notice is that God built power into the fabric of His good creation. Adam and Eve were charged to "rule" over the earth, yet this "ruling" was not intrinsically bad in and of itself. In fact, their rule was meant to reflect the loving rule of God. This is an essential element of what it means to be made "in the image of God." Mankind was designed by God to reflect His loving rule and reign. Old Testament scholar, Michael Heiser notes:

> Humankind was created as God's image…We are created to image God, to be his imagers. It is what we are by definition. The image is not an ability we have, but a status. We are God's representatives on earth. To be human is to image God. This is why Genesis 1:26–27 is followed

---

[40] *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth,* 47.

[41] Pat Sawyer helpfully notes, "Setting aside spurious definitions of what constitutes oppression, this lens can lead one to believe that an 'oppressor' status is *intrinsic* to and *synonymous* with 'whiteness' and that an 'oppressed' status is *intrinsic* to and *synonymous* with 'blackness'. A number of Black intellectuals like Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, Larry Elder, John McWhorter, Glenn Loury, Thomas Chatterton Williams, and Coleman Hughes, among others have rightly expressed significant frustration and pushback against any victim status being resident in what it means to be Black. Notwithstanding the egregious racial history of the United States, the notion of an 'oppressor' status and 'oppressed' status being tied to whiteness and blackness respectively is patently false. It is a purblind contention that defies world history, not to mention anthropological and ontological reality. There are no immutable or permanent attributes assigned to whiteness and blackness along the vector of privilege and oppression. Such a view is an assault on Christian identity and an insurmountable obstacle to Christian unity. Moreover, it is an affront to God who made ALL people in HIS image. In addition, confusion here can lead to erroneous views regarding sin, guilt, and corporate repentance where all modern whites are regarded as complicit in the racial sins of some historical whites. Such factitious claims are an offense and provocation to the biblical understanding of [sin] and the Imago Dei and will be a non-starter to Christian unity." "Cautions Regarding CRT," Christianity Today, March 4, 2021.

by what theologians call the "dominion mandate" in verse 28. The verse informs us that God intends us to…oversee the earth by stewarding it's resources and harnessing them for the benefit of all human imagers.[42]

Of course, it's only a few chapters later that Adam and Eve fall into sin and everything becomes tainted and affected, included their privileged status in creation and their use of power. The rest of the Biblical narrative—and human history—make this abundantly clear.

What's vital to see in this, however, is that God doesn't see privilege or power in inherently oppressive terms. Instead, God assigns privilege and power based upon the unique responsibilities and callings He places upon people. What makes power bad is the corrupting effects of sin on the human heart, but power itself is a gift and stewardship from God.

In fact, even with mankind's fall into sin, God's original design for us remains: we are intended to use our privileged status and power as God's image bearers to cultivate the good, the true, and the beautiful. This is the design and calling for every individual person, but this bears out in specific ways depending upon the person's unique gifting and situations. Moreover, this universal call is fleshed out uniquely through God-ordained institutions like the government (Romans 13), the family (Ephesians 5:22–6:4), and the church (1 Peter 5:1–5). In each case, God calls people under authority to submit to those over them, because when power is rightly used and directed for good purposes, the individuals under their care flourish.[43]

In contrast, Critical Theory sees power as an inherently oppressive reality. Consider again the words of Robin DiAngelo and Oslem Sensoy:

> *Power* in the context of understanding social justice refers to the ideological, technical, and discursive elements by which those in authority impose their ideas and interests on everyone. … From a critical social justice perspective, privilege is defined as systemically conferred dominance and the institutional processes by which the beliefs and values of the dominant group are 'made normal' and universal….Because dominant groups occupy the positions of power, their members receive social and institutional advantages; thus one automatically receives privilege by being a member of a dominant group (e.g. cis[gender]-men, Whites, heterosexuals, the able-bodied, Christians, upper classes)." — Sensoy and DiAngelo[44]

---

[42] Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm,* 40–41.

[43] Of course, this does not rule out the responsibility of civil disobedience when this power is abused. In fact, Christians have a moral obligation to obey God instead of any human institution when the teachings or commands of said institution come into conflict with the Christian faith. As a general maxim, when the state forbids something God commands or commands something God forbids, then Christians are compelled to disobey the laws of man in order to obey the laws of God (cf. Acts 4:19–20; Daniel 6). See R.C. Sproul, "Civil Disobedience," *LigonierMinistries.*

[44] *Is Everyone Really Equal?* 73, 80, 81

With respect to racism in particular, consider the following quotations:

> All whites are racist in this [systemic] use of the term because we benefit from systemic white privilege. —Stephanie Wildman and Adrienne David[45]

> Many critical race theorists and social scientists hold that racism is pervasive, systemic, and deeply ingrained. If we take this perspective, then no white member of society seems quite so innocent.— Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic[46]

Neil Shenvi refers to a striking example of this on Twitter when an, "an evangelical author with 20k+ Twitter followers responding to Pastor Tim Keller's recent op-ed in the NYTimes:

> Tim Keller has NO AUTHORITY to teach on justice—NONE… How INCREDULOUSLY PRIVILEGED for Keller—a RICH WHITE MAN WHOSE MINISTRY TARGETS RICH PEOPLE— to fashion himself as the judge of whether or not injustice rises to the level of OPPRESSION!!! No!!!! The only ones with divine authority to define the bounds of oppression are the oppressed themselves!"**[47]**

This is what Critical Theory does to God's good designs: it sabotages their good use, hijacks their good purpose, and redefines them according to its own worldview. In other words, Critical Theory's interpretation of reality maps onto existing creational realities and assigns them a completely new meaning based upon its own categories and definitions. By implication, God's good designs for human power are recast in totally oppressive terms. This worldview necessarily entails that God-ordained institutions like the government, family, and the church are inherently and irredeemably oppressive.[48]

Even more striking, under Critical Theory, *God Himself* becomes the ultimate oppressor, because God Himself possesses all the power and authority in the universe. Such a conclusion is the logical extension of Critical Theory's operating principles. As such, it is completely incompatible with a Christian position of power and with Christianity itself.

4. **Critical Theorists have no Objective Standard of Justice beyond a person's lived experience. As a result, Critical Theory is radically subjective in nature, shutting down critical inquiry, dissent, and investigation.**

Consider again some claims from critical theorists about the nature of knowledge and experience:

> "One of the key contributions of critical theorists concerns the production of knowledge…. These scholars argue that a key element of social injustice involves the claim that particular knowledge is objective, neutral, and universal. *An approach based on critical theory calls into question the idea that objectivity is desirable or even possible*. The term used to describe this way of thinking about knowledge is that *knowledge is socially constructed*. When we refer to knowledge as

---

[45] *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*,  56

[46] *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 91

[47] Neil Shenvi, "Critical Theory Within Evangelicalism," *ShenviApologetics.*

[48] "The gendered practices of everyday life reproduce a society's view of how women and men should act. Gendered social arrangements are justified by religion and cultural productions and backed by law, but the most powerful means of sustaining the moral hegemony of the dominant gender ideology is that the process is made invisible; any possible alternatives are virtually unthinkable (Foucault 1972; Grasci 1971)." – Judith Lorber, "'Night to His Day': The Social Construction of Gender", *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, 207.

socially constructed we mean that knowledge is reflective of the values and interests of those who produce it." — Sensoy and DiAngelo[49]

"Critical theory challenges the claim that any knowledge is neutral or objective, and outside of humanly constructed meanings and interests." — Sensoy and DiAngelo[50]

"The idea that objectivity is best reached only through rational thought is a specifically Western and masculine way of thinking."– Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins[51]

Notice how Critical Theory understands knowledge and experience. It is self-defeating on a couple of levels. First, it understands rational thought to be a form of oppression. This is interesting, because the authors must use reason and rationality to make this statement. Secondly, these authors renounce the notion of objective truth, but they speak as though their pronouncements are, in fact, the objective truth of the matter. In other words, they don't want us to take their words as open-for-interpretation. Instead, they believe and want us to believe they are telling the truth in an objective, verifiably way.

In effect, the statements of critical theorists about the nature of truth are the equivalent of, "I can't write a word in English," or "There are no sentences longer than five words." These statements are ultimately self defeating, because they do the very thing the writers claim cannot be done. Critical theorists reject the existence of objective truth and rationality while at the same time employing the tools of objectivity and reason. There claims are, thus, self-defeating.

Aside from this logical problem with Critical Theory, the Bible articulates a very different relationship between knowledge and experience. The Bible, indeed, values experience as a means of knowing. Our lived experiences are very important for our discipleship and spiritual formation. We meet people, endure struggles, and encounter various situations through our lived experiences. Most importantly, we experience Christ and the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts, relationships, and churches.

It's important to see, however, that the Bible does not ascribe ultimate authority to human experience. To do this makes human perceptions infallible—ascribing them with a divine authority reserved only for God's Word (2 Timothy 3:14–16). Instead, the Bible calls us to test *all* things—even our experiences.

> Don't despise prophecies, but *test all things*. Hold on to what is good. Stay away from every kind of evil. — 1 Thessalonians 5:20–22

To test all things requires us to have an objective standard of truth by which to measure any claim or experience against. This is why the Bible is so important, because it provides us the standard by which to measure everything—every claim, every experience, every….everything! This is why Paul prayed for the Philippians:

> And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and *every kind of discernment,* so that you may approve the things that are superior and may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. — Philippians 1:9–11

When it comes to the pursue of justice, the question of an objective standard is vital. If we don't have an objective standard of justice, then we will be forced into pursuits that are contrary or inconsistent with God's Word. God cares deeply about justice and so should we. The problem is when we undertake the

---

[49] *Is Everyone Really Equal?*, 29

[50] *Is Everyone Really Equal?,* 187

[51] "Reconstructing Knowledge," in Anderson and Collins, *Race, Class, and Gender*, 4-5

pursuit of justice without an objective sense of what God require of us. Consider what God says through Jeremiah:

> For if you *truly* amend your ways and your deeds, if you *truly* execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. — Jeremiah 7:5–7 ESV

Because God has revealed Himself throughout History, people who speak for Him have always been able to make the exhortation to pursue something on the basis of what is objectively true. God's standard provides the very basis upon which moral claims can be made and upon which moral actions can be evaluated.

By contrast, Critical Theory is radically subjective, defining justice and injustice according to the lived experiences of oppressed groups.[52] To follow this vision of justice requires us to elevate the lived experiences of people to an infallible degree—even if those experiences disagree with each other. This makes Critical Theory impervious to critique, becoming a form of dogmatic fundamentalism that isn't concerned with truth—only advancing its agenda. This approach insulates people from the questioning and feedback necessary to rightly interpret one's experiences (Proverbs 12:1; 18:17; 24:4–5). If we really want to do justice, we cannot embrace this approach.

As Civil Rights legend, John Perkins, put it well:

> The problem of injustice is a God-sized problem. If we don't start with him first, whatever we're seeking, it ain't justice…Without truth, there can be no justice. And what is our ultimate standard of truth? It is not our feelings. It is not popular opinion. It is not what presidents or politicians say. God's Word is the standard of truth. If we're trying harder to align with the rising opinions of our day than with the Bible, then we ain't doing real justice.[53]

### 5. Critical Theorists tend to Deny the Bible's Teaching on Universal Human Sinfulness

Recall that Critical Theorists exempt certain individuals from certain moral evils in virtue of their level of oppression. Because oppression is primarily seen in systemic terms and not flowing out of a human heart, these individuals cannot be guilty of certain evils that create the unjust system. Functionally, this means that certain individuals become innocent of certain sins. As Robin DiAngelo puts it with regard to racism:

> [S]o-called 'reverse racism' or 'reverse sexism' do not exist, because racism and sexism refer to power relations that are historic, embedded, and pervasive….Racism [is defined as]: A form of oppression in which one racial group dominates others. In the United States the dominant group is white, therefore *racism is white racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination…*
> From an antiracist perspective, when I say that *only whites can be racist*, I mean that in the United States only whites have collective social and institutional power and privilege over people of color. [54]

---

[52] "Without God's goodness as a plumb line for right and wrong, moderns have no framework with which to judge the clear evils that exist in human behavior. So they've settles on a simplistic moral standard that boils all sin down to a single category: oppression." Jayme Metzgar, "Hate Hoaxes Are What Happen When Your Religion Is Identity Politics," *The Federalist*, February 20, 2019,

[53] John Perkins, "Forward," to Williams, *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth.*

[54] *What Does it Mean to Be White?,* 66, 108, 109.

The problem with this, of course, is that the Bible makes it very clear that *everyone* is guilty of sin (Romans 3:23) and liable to the various manifestations of a sinful heart. In the first century, in which there were probably no white people at all, the early church had to deal with the sin of ethnic pride and partiality because these are aspects of human sinfulness (James 2:1–13).

Sin is no respecter of persons—regardless of one's race, class, or gender, human depravity exists within every human heart. As such, even people who experiences real injustice and oppression must examine their own hearts to discover sinful beliefs, desires, and commitments that are leading them away from God and His design for their life. Their experience of oppression, therefore, is no excuse for their unrighteousness. Instead, as the Scriptures make clear:

> When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: fear God and keep his commands, because *this is for all humanity.* For God will bring *every act to judgment,* including every hidden thing, whether good or evil. — Ecclesiastes 12:13–14

For Christians, we must recognize that no one is innocent or guilty in virtue of their status of power within a certain group. Power or lack thereof are not sufficient categories by which to ascribe innocence or guilt.

Instead, the Bible tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; [but] they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:23–24).

We need something more comprehensive than Critical Theory's power-dynamics to analyze and evaluate our hearts. We need something that can cut through the power-dynamics and the many layers of privilege or oppression that may exist. We need something that cuts through to the human heart and provides an objective diagnosis of our actual condition.

In other words, *we need the Bible*. The author of Hebrews declares:

> For the word of God is *living* and *effective* and *sharper than any double-edged sword,* p*enetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow.* It is *able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. No creature is hidden from him*, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom *we must give an account.* — Hebrews 4:12–13

Because of it's emphasis on power-dynamics, Critical Theory discourages self-reflection and as a result, denies the potential for moral evils within the heart of those who are classified as oppressed. In an ironic twist, the very people Critical Theory seeks to liberate become further entrenched in layers of spiritual oppression as they become further enslaved to their own sinfulness. This is the very opposite of what Jesus came to do (Isaiah 61:1–3; Luke 4:17–18; John 8:36–38). Monique Duson was once a CRT adherent. She describes this exact experience in her own life:

> With CRT's constant focus on evil systems, I had become oblivious to the evil in my own heart. I couldn't see aspects of my own privilege. I had become blind to my own prejudices. CRT encouraged my tribal favoritism…[55]

Rosaria Butterfield, a former feminist and scholar on critical women's studies, observes:

> Because intersectionality does not have a biblical category of sin, it does not have a biblical category of repentance, redemption, or grace. Because it does not start with a robust understanding that human identity is an image-bearing reflection of God—that all people are

---

[55] Quoted in Williams, *Confronting Injustice,* 108

made in His image (Gen. 1:27)—it has no concept of what it means to grow in the knowledge, righteousness, and holiness of Christ.[56]

Because it gives special status to those it deems to be oppressed, Critical Theory denies the universal nature of human sinfulness. To do so would be to "blame the victim," which sounds virtuous. But in fact, it is another form of spiritual oppression, locking someone away from the critical feedback and self-awareness necessary to see their sin for what it is and take it to throne of grace for forgiveness and redemption (Psalm 139:23–24; Romans 3:21–26; Hebrews 4:14–16).

6. **Critical Theory overgeneralizes and vilifies whole groups of people. This hurts the very people it seeks to help, making them perpetually offended, suspicious, and insecure.**

Because Critical Theory views members of a dominant group as inherently oppressive, it inculcates a mentality of hostility and opposition to any member of the oppressor class. This is why one critical theorist, who's also a black feminist, wrote the following after witnessing what she believed to be a case of racial injustice against her friend on an airplane when she had to give up her seat for a white man:

> I am writing this essay sitting beside an anonymous white male that I long to murder…I felt a "killing rage." I wanted to stab him softly, to shoot him with the gun I wished I had in my purse. And as I watched his pain, I would say to him tenderly "racism hurts." … Confronting my rage, witnessing the way it moved me to grow and change, I understood intimately that it had the potential not only to destroy but also to construct. Then and now I understand rage to be a necessary aspect of resistance struggle. Rage can act as a catalyst inspiring courageous action. By demanding that black people repress and annihilate our rage is to assimilate, to reap the benefits of material privilege in white supremacist capitalist patriarchal culture, white folks urge us to remain complicit with their efforts to colonize, oppress, and exploit.[57]

Consider these words in comparison to words of Jesus and the apostle Paul:

> Then Peter approached him and asked, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?" "I tell you, not as many as seven," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven. — Matthew 18:21–22 (this whole chapter is a powerful contrast to the words above)

> Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ. — Ephesians 5:31–32

> But now, put off all such things as anger, rage, malice, slander, abusive language from your mouth. — Colossians 3:8 NET

Because critical theory sees every injustice as evidence of larger oppression, it necessary indicts whole groups of people for their complicity in an invisible system. Sadly, this invisible system is often more perceived than real, causing people to interpret the actions of others in the worst possible light. Conner Barnes knew this well. As a college student and former anarchist who viewed the oppressive power of the state as something to be overturned, he provides some insight into the psychological operations of someone who believes the tenants of Critical Theory:

---

[56] Rosaria Butterfield, "Intersectionality and the Church," *Tabletalk Magazine,* April 2020.

[57] bell hooks, "Killing Rage: Militant Resistance," *Saint Josephus University Online,* https://sjugenderstudies.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/killingrage-bell-hooks.pdf

> We…saw insidious oppression and exploitation in all social relationships, stifling our ability to relate to others or ourselves without cynicism…To see every interaction as containing hidden violence is to become a permanent victim, because if all you are is a nail, everything looks like a hammer.[58]

This is both terribly sad and tragic. Once again, in its effort to liberate people through the recognition and deconstructing of power-dynamics, Critical Theory further entrenches the spiritual oppression of people by making everything a matter of personal offense. The Bible doesn't deny that offense exists, but it gives us a completely different way to respond. Consider the following passages:

> Hatred stirs up conflicts, but love covers all offenses. — Proverbs 10:12 (cf. 1 Peter 4:8)

> A person's insight gives him patience, and his virtue is to overlook an offense. — Proverbs 19:11

> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord." But "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink." For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head. Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.— Romans 12:17–21

At every historical point in which the Bible was written, both the writers and the audience had to deal with real oppression, injustice, and sinfulness. But the Biblical ethic of love demanded a different response. As Thaddeus Williams points out, "When Jesus commanded his listeners to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them, he was talking to real people with real enemies and real oppressors."[59]

With its totalizing categories and hyper-sensitivity to offense, Critical Theory seems to encourage the worst of human sinfulness—even encouraging it's adherents to cultivate false-virtues of bitterness and rage. But as long as we allow the hooks of hatred and bitterness to rule our hearts, we will see every offense as a moral justification for outrage. Such a response ruins the human soul, cutting it off from the life-giving power of grace, love, and forgiveness.

In fact, this is exactly what good counselors know and understand. Thaddeus Williams observes:

> Good psychologists help phobics *ungeneralize*. Whether through exposure or cognitive therapy, good psychologists help people internalize that specific trauma should not be generalized in a way that the whole begins to feel more traumatic than it already is. Trauma from *this* spider does not mean that all spiders are out to kill you; trauma from *this* sickness does not mean the whole microscopic world is plotting your death from every doorknob.[60]

This fact is worth further exploration, because it highlights how self-defeating and psychologically damaging the worldview of Critical Theory is when applied to human relationships.

Through various techniques of exposure, counter-evidence, and separation, there is a vast supply of literature documenting the importance of challenging the generalized conclusions of individuals— especially when it causes them to interpret their world in unnecessarily hostile, traumatic, or painful ways.

---

[58] "Sad Radicals," December 11, 2018, *Quilette*.

[59] Ibid. 65

[60] Ibid. 141

Psychologist Jonathan Haidt lists some of the symptoms of unhealthy psychological reasoning that he seeks to treat within people:

- Emotional Reasoning: Letting your feelings guide your interpretation of reality.
- Catastrophizing: Focusing on the worst possible outcome and seeing it as the most likely
- Overgeneralizing: Perceiving a global pattern of negatives on the basis of a single incident.
- Dichotomous Thinking: Viewing events or people in all or nothing terms.
- Mind Reading: Assuming that you know what people think without having sufficient evidence of their thoughts
- Labeling: Assigning global negative traits to yourself or others (also called dichotomous or "black and white" thinking).
- Negative Filtering: you focus almost exclusively on the negatives and seldom notice the positives
- Discounting Positives: Claiming that the positive things you or others do are trivial, so that you can maintain a negative judgment
- Blaming: Focusing on the other person as the source of your negative feelings; you refuse to take responsibility for change yourself.[61]

As you reflect on this list, just ask yourself: which one of these unhealthy psychological habits does Critical Theory encourages its adherents *not* to do? Exactly—in almost every case, Critical Theorists encourage their adherents to engage in unhealthy psychological reasoning. This doesn't deny the existence of real injustice or oppression in a person's life, but the tenets and worldview of critical theory compound and exacerbate these incidents to become totalizing lenses by which to view people.

Moreover, these psychological habits encourage a type of psychological "witch hunt" in which people are encouraged to view members of a dominant group with higher levels of suspicion. In effect, this encourages people to interpret an experience of racist or oppressive—even when such qualities do not exist in the interaction. As sociologist Musa al-Gharbi observes:

> There is abundant research demonstrating harm caused by heightened perceptions of racism, discrimination, racialized violence, and racial inequality. There are very well-established and highly adverse impacts of the psychological (and even physical) well being of people of color when they perceive more racism, racial inequality, and discrimination…We have ample reason to believe that sensitizing people to better perceive and take greater offense at these "slights" actually would cause harm. [62]

Thaddeus Williams provides some valuable theological insight here:

> We must see [Critical Theory] for what it is. It . . . is a theodicy. It attempts to explain the world's evil and suffering by making group identities the primary categories through which we interpret all pain in the universe. No matter how much it waves the banners of "justice," "equality," and "liberation," do we really think such a grand experiment in collectivist group blaming will end well? If the body count of the last century has taught us anything, it is that ideas have consequences, and bad ideas have bad consequences. Telling damnable stories about entire people groups, seeing individuals as exemplars of their groups, and blaming the hardness of life on them are really bad ideas. They should be given no foothold in the church of Jesus Christ.[63]

---

[61] Summarized from Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind,* 38.

[62]"Who Get's to Define What's Racist?" March 25, 2020, *Contexts*, https://contexts.org/blog/who-gets-to-define-whats-racist/

[63] Ibid. 60. Williams uses the label "Social Justice B" instead of the phrase Critical Theory. This is to contrast "Social Justice A," which is biblical justice.

### 7. Critical Theory seems to requires partiality for the oppressed, therefore violating the Biblical standards of justice.

Recall that Biblical Injustice requires no partiality—not even for the poor or most vulnerable. Consider the following passages:

> Do not deny justice or show partiality to *anyone*. Do not accept a bribe, for it blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. — Deuteronomy 10:19

> "Do not act unjustly when deciding a case. Do not be partial to *the poor* or give preference *to the rich*; *judge your neighbor fairly.* — Leviticus 19:15

Of course, these verse must be balanced with Gods deep concern for the oppressed and most vulnerable of society. God is deeply committed to liberating and helping those who are poor, because they are the most at risk for exploitation and injustice (Psalm 9:7–10; 146:5–7; Prov. 14:31; 22:22–23; Zech. 7:9–10). In making this point about Critical Theory, we must acknowledge the Scriptures are very clear that the human heart is prone to promote favoritism and partiality within one's own tribe or preference group. This is why the book of James provides the following reminder and rebuke:

> My brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. **2** For if someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor person dressed in filthy clothes also comes in, **3** if you look with favor on the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," **4** haven't you made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? — James 2:1–4

At the same time, we must remember that Biblical Justice requires us to treat everyone equally before the law. That's why God commands His people to show no partiality to anyone—not even the vulnerable. There most be equal standards of justice applied to everyone on the merits of the case. In other words, God holds individuals accountable for their actions—even when those actions are committed by people who are poor and oppressed. In fact, God says that the failure to hold equal standards of justice is an abomination before Him (Proverbs 20:10).

This understanding stands at the foundation of Western society, symbolized by "Lady-Justice"—a woman holding a weighted scale while her eyes are blindfolded. The principle is that justice must be blind to things such as race, class, and gender, because those factors are irrelevant to deciding guilt or innocence.

This is precisely the *opposite* approach to justice that Critical Theory takes. Consider the following claims:

> *It is about race if a person of color thinks it's about race.* This may sound at first like I'm asking you to just take every person of color's word for it, as if they are infallible… But the truth is, whether or not someone is fallible is beside the point. *We are, each and every one of us, a collection of our lived experiences…* And so, *if a person of color says that something is about race, it is*— because regardless of the details, regardless of whether or not you can connect the dots from the outside, their racial identity is a part of them, and it is interacting with the situation. —Ijeoma Oluo[64]

---

[64] *So You Want to Talk About Race,* 15

> "…the God of the oppressed *takes sides with the black community*. God is not color-blind in the black-white struggle, but has made *an unqualified identification with blacks."* — James Cone[65]

Scott Allen perceptively responds:

> We are morally obligated [as Christians] to care for truly oppressed and victimized people. However, the Bible doesn't define victims or oppressors in the same way that ideological social justice [Critical Theory] does. Oppressors are certainly not exclusively white men, nor are victims exclusively people of color, women or LGBTQ members. In the Bible, victims look a lot more like the man beaten up, robbed, and left to die alongside the road in the parable of the good Samaritan.[66]

He continues:

> Yes, we have a moral duty to care for the oppressed and victimized people, but we have to understand who these people are biblically—not according to the presuppositions of ideological social justice [critical theory].[67]

Throughout Scripture, it's clear that God gives a special *attention* to those who are oppressed, but He does not give them special *treatment* under the law. God's people are exhorted to care for the most vulnerable—the poor, the widow, the foreigner, and the orphan. Indeed, special attention must be given to these people because these are the one who are most likely to be victimized by sinful people within positions of power. But even these most vulnerable people cannot use their vulnerable or oppressed status as justification for special treatment before the law. Again, Scott Allen notes:

> True Justice treats all people the same, regardless of skin color, ethnicity, sex, gender, or any other immutable character. The Bible teaches that in a legal setting, guilt can only be determined on the basis of witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15), and those witnesses must speak truthfully. Bearing false witness is a grave violation of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:16). Biblical justice is committed to discovering truth about guilt or innocent is based on actions and behavior, not on membership in a so-called oppressor group.[68]

## 8. Critical Theory's emphasis on group identity dehumanizes people and denies the inherent dignity of each individual—regardless of race, class, or gender.

Consider the following statement from one author:

> "If you are white in a white supremacist society, *you are racist*. If you are male in a patriarchy, *you are sexist*. If you are able-bodied, *you are ableist*. If you are anything above poverty in a capitalist society, *you are classist*. You can sometimes be all of these things at one."—Ijeoma Oluo[69]

Another striking example comes from a recent collection of essays on prayer and renewal:

---

[65] *Black Liberation Theology,* 6. In fairness, Cone was not a Critical Race Theorist, but rather a liberation theologian. Nevertheless, his theology of liberation is a central and recurring theme within Critical Theory. Thus, Cone shared the same ideology and principle on this point as Critical Theorists do.

[66] *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice,* 81.

[67] *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice*, 81.

[68] *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice*, 88.

[69] *So You Want to Talk About Race*, 216-217

> Dear God, Please help me to hate white people. Or at least to want to hate them. At least, I want to stop caring about them, individually and collectively. I want to stop caring about their misguided, racist souls, to stop believing that they can be better, that they can stop being racist.[70]

Notice how these statements automatically impute a moral status to someone based upon their race, gender, ability, and class. In this understanding, "Individuals are little more than mouthpieces for communities based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity."[71] In response to this notion, Scott Allen perceptively notes:

> Christians can agree with social justice advocates on one point: Human beings are shaped profoundly by groups. The Bible affirms that we are not merely individuals but are social beings made for relationships…We are part of groups (families, churches, ethnicities) that deeply shape who we are. We are acculturated into these groups by shared languages, values, habits, and histories. But we forcefully deny that human identity can be reduced to group identity. The groups we belong to shape us. They do not define us. The bedrock of human identity is found in our common creation…and in God's gracious open door to redemption…Followers of Jesus must never be complicit in an ideology that encourages the dehumanization of our neighbors, particularly when the dehumanization is based on an immutable characteristic such as skin color[72]

In practice, history has shown us that such a totalizing view of human identity can be catastrophic. Scott Allen provides a vivid example for how Critical Theory came to practice in 2015 at Yale University.

> This presuppositions about human nature was put on display in a now infamous YouTube video that captured an angry confrontation between a group of Yale University students in 2015 and Professor Nicholas Christakis. At one point in the exchange, Christakis says to his interlocutors: "So I have a vision for us a people, as human beings that actually privileges our common humanity…that is interested not in what is different among us, but what is the same." In response, a black student gets in his face and says: "Look me right in the eye. Look at me! Your experience will never connect to mine."[73]

Notice how group identity became central in this exchange. Because the professor and the student were of different race, the power dynamics involved necessitated the student to see himself as an oppressed person of whom the professor could not identify with. There was no common sense of humanity; there was only competing group identities. This is dehumanizing and it is *exactly* what Critical Theory and its advocates call for.

Ta-Nehisi Coates provides a final, shocking example of this when he described his reaction to watching the New York City police and fire fighters rush into the World Trade Center buildings on 9/11:

> They were not human to me. Black, white, or whatever, they were menaces of nature; they were the fire, the comet, the storm, which could—with no justification—shatter my body.[74]

---

[70]Chanequa Walker-Barnes, "Prayer of a Weary Black Woman," in *A Rhythm of Prayer: A Collection of Meditations for Renewal,* edited by Sarah Bessey, 69.

[71] Nancy Pearcey, *Finding Truth*, 118.

[72] *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice,* 63, 66.

[73] *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice*, 62; Elianna Johnson, "The Road to Yales Free Speech Crisis," *National Review,* July 5, 2016.

[74] Rich Lowry, "Ta-Nehisi Coates' stunted view of America," *NewYorkPost*, July 24, 2015.

Such an approach to justice will never yield true justice—justice that is based upon the objective reality of all people being created in God's image. Because Critical Theory sees certain groups in primarily oppressive categories, it rejects the common humanity people share across group lines. In effect, this approach perpetuates injustice and racism, because it creates forms of discrimination and oppression solely based upon external identification markers like race, class, and gender. Such an approach is inconsistent with Scripture and must be rejected.

## 9. Critical Theory Wrongly Assumes that all Disparities are Automatically the Result of Discrimination.

The social sciences are a web complex academic fields. We recognize our limitations in speaking to such a complex subject, especially with respect to economic and social disparities. Nevertheless, we believe there are serious problems created when one assumes that disparities are automatic evidence of discrimination—especially when the proposed solution is to work for equal outcomes, regardless of social inputs and the many variables associated with them. Haidt and Lukianoff observe:

> If activists embrace the equal-outcomes form of social justice—if they interpret all deviations from population norms as evidence of systemic bias—they they will get drawn into endless and counterproductive campaigns, even against people who share their goals.[75]

Why is this? Speaking specifically of the pursuit of equal outcomes in group representation on university campuses (i.e. sports teams), they observe:

> Correlation doesn't imply causation. Yet in many discussions in universities these days, the correlation of a demographic trait or identity group membership with an outcome gap is taken as evidence that discrimination (structural or individual) caused the outcome gap. Sometimes it [does], but sometimes it [doesn't], but if people can't raise alternative possible causal explanations without eliciting negative consequences, then the community is unlikely to arrive at an accurate understanding the problem. And without understanding the true nature of a problem, there is little chance of solving it.[76]

Jason C. Riley of the Manhattan Institute observes:

> Many people have convinced themselves that evidence of ongoing racial bias proves beyond any doubt that racism in America today remains the major barrier to black progress. Whether other factors play a bigger role is a question seldom asked, let alone investigated with any rigor. In fact, to even ask such a question is enough to earn the wrath of those who believe racism is an all-purpose explanation for bad black outcomes in America today.[77]

The point these authors are making is that we cannot assume that representative disparities are automatic evidence of discrimination within social groups. Sometimes, that's certainly the case. But we must be willing to ask: Are there other factors? Are there other casual pathways? Are there other reasons for such disparities? If we don't ask these questions, then our quest for justice will not be as informed by the truth and it's context as it needs to be. This is why Proverbs warns: "Even zeal is not good without knowledge, and the one who acts hastily sins" (Proverbs 19:2).

---

[75] *The Coddling of the American Mind*, 230.

[76] Ibid. 231–232.

[77]"Barriers to Black Progress: Personal, Structural, or Both?" *The Manhattan Institute.*

And yet, this is exactly the approach that some critical theorists want us to take. Consider again the words of Ibram X. Kendi:

> We have a hard time recognizing that racial discrimination is the sole cause of racial disparities in this country and in the world at large…When you truly believe that the racial groups are equal, then you also believe that racial disparities must be the result of racial discrimination.[78]

By contrast, Thomas Sowell observes:

> Any serious study of racial and ethnic groups, whether in a given society or in a wide variety of societies in countries around the world, repeatedly encounters the inescapable fact of large and numerous disparities among these groups, whether in income, education, crime rates, IQs or many other things. These differences cannot be dismissed as mere "perceptions" or "stereotypes," nor can they be automatically attributed to some one given cause, such as genetics, as was often the primary cause cited in the twentieth century, or to the maltreatment by others, as was equally often cited in the late twentieth century. The sources of disparities are numerous and complex, and they must be confronted in their complexity, if we are seeking the truth, rather than trying to promote a vision or an agenda.[79]

Sowell continues:

> One fact that seems blatant and inescapable is that social groups, whether racial or otherwise, have major differences in their outcomes, whether in educational institutions, in the economy or in other aspects of life. When the many factors that can influence group outcomes are considered—including geography, history, demographics, culture, happenstances and the other groups with whom they compete, whether in the market, in the schools, at the polls or on the battlefields—the probability that all these factors, and more, would work out in such a way as to produce the same end results for different groups shrinks to the vanishing point.[80]

Pat Sawyer similarly observes:

> The emphasis on white supremacy and the ostensible ubiquity of racism can lead one to believe that any disparity plaguing POC[81] is rooted in racism. This is emphatically false. While we cannot deny that racism has some impact on disparity today in certain cases, it is nevertheless false to assume racism is always at work. Moreover, today racism is rarely the singular cause of disparity. In other words, the reasons for any disparity are hardly ever monocausal, instead they are almost always multivariate.[82]

This is especially the case when we discuss the impact of family values upon social and economic disparities. There is much to say about the effect of growing up in a loving, supportive family and the impact this has on one's life. Even when there are shared socio-economic or racial identities, the research is clear that disparities tend to exist *within groups* of people who grow up in loving, supportive family environments vs. those who do not. This is true across social and racial lines, but it is especially true when students come from a two-parent household and is a person holding to a religious faith.

---

[78] *Stamped from the Beginning,* 11.

[79] *Intellectuals and Race,* 7

[80] *Intellectuals and Race,* 122.

[81] "People/Persons of Color"

[82] "Cautions Regarding CRT," Christianity Today, March 4, 2121

Academic achievement is one example that illustrates this well. As William Jeynes observes:

> The data are clear: parental family structure and parental involvement were major explanatory factors and solutions with respect to the achievement gap…Research by Dick Carpenter, Al Ramirez, and Laura Severn found that gaps caused by family factors were often larger than those caused by race. There is an old adage among many family scientists that when a Caucasian comes from a single parent or a blended family structure, he or she loses the advantage of being white. It is still rather unusual for a white child to be born out of wedlock (a 28.2 percent chance), but it is common for an African American student to come from a single parent family (a 69.4 percent chance)…Perhaps most significantly, the meta-analysis revealed that, if an African American or Latino student was a person of faith and came from a two-biological-parent family, the achievement gap *totally disappeared*, even when adjusting for socioeconomic status.[83]

Thomas Sowell provides two additional examples of this:

- Traffic Stops—a rise of black drivers pulled over does not *necessarily* indicate a rise in race-based discrimination. It *could* mean this, but it could also be reflective of a rise in crime rates in predominantly black communities or a rise of speeding among younger black drivers. A specific example of this occurred on the New Jersey Turnpike in 2001, during which time more black drivers than white drivers were pulled over. However the *Speed Violations of New Jersey Turnpike: Final Report* came out with an analysis of this phenomenon and found that "in the southern segment of the turnpike, where the speed limit if 65 mph, 2.7 percent of black drivers were speeders, compared with 1.4. percent of white drivers. Among drivers going faster than 90 m.p.h. the disparity was even greater…Demographic research has [also] shown that the black population is younger than the white population, and younger drivers are more likely to speed."[84]

- Academic Achievement: — "In Australia…Chinese students spent more than twice as much time on their homework as white students did. How surprised should we be that Asian students in general tend to do better academically than white students in general, *in predominantly white societies* such as Australia, Britain, or the United States? The same pattern can be seen among whole nations, as such Asian countries as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore likewise show patterns of hard work by their students and academic results on international tests that place these countries above most Western nations."[85]

---

[83] "Faith and Family Play a Bigger Role in Academic Achievement Than Race or Socioeconomic Status," *The Public Discourse,* January 30, 2020.

[84] Sowell, *Discrimination and Disparities,* 95."Different people with different priorities making different choices will experiences different outcomes….The more fully committed we become to a vision of justice in which unequal outcomes are automatically assumed to be the result of injustice, the more our quest for justice will lead … to the use of force to enforce sameness….If we don't bother to distinguish between inequalities that come from sin and those that don't, then we are well on our way not to a fictional dystopia but to repeating the bloodiest mistakes of modern history." — Thaddeus Williams (*Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth),* 86–87.

[85] *Discrimination and Disparities*, 102–103 Sowell cites, Richard Lynn, *The Global Bell Curve: Race, IQ, and Inequality Worldwide* (2008), 51; James Bartholomew, *The Welfare of Nations* (2016), 104–106; *PISA 2015: Results in Focus* (2018), 5.

Sowell also notes:[86]

- Twenty-two of the twenty-nine astronauts in the original Apollo space program were firstborns.
- People living in the United States experience 90% of the worlds tornadoes
- Asians are underrepresented in the NBA, NFL, NHL, and MLB.
- Women are overrepresented in health care, in attaining university degrees, and in setting consumer trends that determine the actions of the world's biggest corporations.
- Men make up the overwhelming majority of soldiers who perish on the battlefields and have a virtual monopoly on bricklaying, plumbing, and carpentry industries.
- Jewish people are less than 1% of the world's population, but have received 22% of Nobel Priozes in chemistry, 32% in medicine, and 32 % in physics.

What does all this data demonstrate? Simply, that disparities are a regular feature of human activity in a world of free-people who organize their lives according to their own values, priorities, interests, disciplines, and goals. Sowell concludes, "The idea that the world *would* be a level playing field, if it were not for…discrimination, is a preconception in defiance of both facts and logic."[87] This is not to suggest that discrimination isn't responsible for any disparities or that Christians should check out from the search for systemic injustices .It's only to challenge the notion that disparities are *automatic evidence* of racism, discrimination, or other forms of injustice.

Once again, we recognize the complexity of this element of critique but that's precisely why we want to draw your attention to it. Because Critical Theorists tend to make a one-way causal connection between economic disparities and personal/racial discrimination, their problem-solution matrix is often too simple to meaningfully account for such disparities and the complexities associated with them. Andrew Sullivan insightfully notes:

> There is no space in this worldview for studying any factor that might create or exacerbate racial or ethnic differences or inequalities apart from pure racism. If there are any neutral standards that suggest inequalities or differences of any sort between ethnic groups, they are also ipso facto racist standards. In fact, the idea of *any* higher or lower standard for anything is racist…In this view of the world, difference always means hierarchy.[88]

For the Christian seeking to honor God and neighbor by doing justice, we must be willing to critique overly simplistic narratives and consider other factors at work. Failure to do so leads us down a road of good intentions, but is not likely to produce positive—or just—outcomes. This will require us to ask other questions, listen patiently, and do our research. If we want to seek justice, then we must do the hard work of gathering the truth about the situation and context we enter into.

---

[86] *Discrimination and Disparities*, 11.

[87] *Discrimination and Disparities,* 18.

[88] "A Glimpse at the Intersectional Left's Political Endgame," NYMag, November 15, 2019. Sullivan offers these statements critically, specifically in criticism of Ibram Kendis book, *How to be an Antiracist.*

**10. Critical Theory doesn't work—it doesn't reduce prejudice, foster reconciliation, or bring forth justice. In fact it creates and perpetuates more injustice and oppression.**

In his insightful review of Robin DiAngelo's book, *White Fragility*, sociologist George Yancey observes:

> What about the empirical results of anti-racism techniques? The type of diversity training that emerges from such efforts has been shown to have little long-term effect on prejudice. Further, focusing on privilege can actually decrease sympathy for poor white people while not raising the overall sympathy for black people. Research seems to indicate that taking the route of [Robin] DiAngelo is not lessening our racial hostility—but it may be making that hostility worse.[89]

Speaking about this effect on college campuses, Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff identity a strategy they call "common-enemy identity politics," in which groups of people vilify someone or even whole groups of people in support of their ideological ends. One example is an essay entitle "Your DNA is an Abomination" written by a Latino student in 2017 at Texas State university. The essay begins like this:

> When I think of all the white people I have ever encountered—whether they've been professors, peers, lovers, friends, police officers, etcetera—there is perhaps only a dozen I would consider "decent…Ontologically speaking, white death will mean liberation for all…Until then, remember this: I hate you because you shouldn't exist. You are both the dominant apparatus on the planet and the void in which all other cultures, upon meeting you, die[90]

These words are shocking, but they seem to flow logically from the worldview articulated by many of the critical theorists we've examine. As a result, it seems like Critical Theory is deeply self defeating—it perpetuates the very evils of racism, discrimination, and oppression it seeks to abolish by establishing a perpetual struggle of "Us vs. Them" along the lines of race, class, gender, etc.

Such an approach must be rejected by followers of Jesus, because such an approach is antithetical to the gospel and completely opposite to the call for justice we've been given. If we're really going to pursue justice as God commands, then we must see all people—regardless of their race, class, gender, etc.—as both equally fallen and equally valuable. Scott Allen perceptively notes:

> Ultimately, injustice isn't a social problem. It is a moral problem. Injustice exists because we are fallen, sinful, selfish people. The only solution is a personal, heart-level transformation, not just for a particular group of so called "oppressors," but for everyone. Biblical transformation encompasses both the inward and the outward, the personal and the societal, the regeneration of fallen human hearts and minds and the reformation of society.[91]

George Yancey agrees, noting the failure of all secular models to provide complete solutions to the problem of racial injustice:

> All [secular models] focus on a single explanation for why racism is a problem in our society….Each of [them] identifies one source of racial conflict and proposes solution to deal with that source….Their weakness lies in their refusal to identity other sources of the problem. At best, these incomplete models can help us correct certain aspects of racial tension, but they will never eradicate the problem….If racial conflict has a spiritual foundation, then secular models are unable to identify the true source of the conflict…Racism is a spiritual and moral problem. Only if

---

[89] "Not White Fragility—Mutual Responsibility," *The Gospel Coalition.*

[90] *The Coddling of the American Mind*, 62–63.

[91] *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice*, 73

we see how our sin nature is the primary source for all other sources of racial tension will we be able to stop treating symptoms and tear this disease out by its awful roots.[92]

None of this is to suggest that we shouldn't work to social or structural change, but it means we must recognize the root problem for all societies are the *people* who inhabit them. Many people are quick to point out that we can't "just preach the gospel" and hope that social ills will be corrected. This criticism has some merit, as even the most gospel-centered people throughout history (like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield) owned slaves and were complicit within a racist system. However, the problem is not with gospel, but with the people who proclaimed it. Indeed, the solution is not just *preaching* the gospel, but also *applying* the gospel to all areas of life.

Unlike Critical Theory, the gospel has a long track record of reconciling people, tearing down walls of division, and working toward personal and systematic justice. With this in mind, we must place our confidence where it belongs: not in the social activism promoted by critical theorists, but in the life changing power of Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate reconciler and we are His ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:20).

---

[92] *Beyond Racial Gridlock,* 78–79. Yancey specifically critiques four secular models: the colorblindness model, the Anglo-conformity model, the multiculturalism model, and the white responsibility model.

## E. Christian Attempts to Appropriate Critical Theory in the Pursuit of Justice.

With this criticism in mind, we want to make a final observation. In recent yers, there's been a surge of interest with respect to social justice among Christians—especially with respect to matters of race. This is a good thing. Unfortunately, many efforts to pursue racial justice are infused with the problematic elements of Critical Theory outlined and critiqued above.

Once again, we want to emphasize: a Christian is well within his biblical and theological rights to incorporate areas of truth from non-Christian disciplines. The biblical doctrine of Common Grace enables us to do so. The difficulty, however, is when Christians pursue justice from a posture and perspective that incorporates the elements of Critical Theory that are *incompatible* with Scripture. In this way, we believe they run the risk of being taken captive by the hollow and deceptive philosophies of our age (Colossians 2:8; Romans 12:1–2).

For example, in the book *Can White People Be Saved?,* several authors were published by Evangelical Publishing House Intervarsity Press under the auspices of Fuller Theological Seminary. In the opening pages of the book, the authors claim to "deftly deploy cutting-edge theory in racial and ethnic studies" and draw on "critical theorists [who] advocate for analyses of racism that explore how other communities of color [outside the Black/White binary] experience the effects of racialization."[93]

In this book, the authors make a distinction between white skin color and whiteness as an ideological concept. The former refers to a quality inherent within Anglo people of whom the death of Jesus is sufficient for salvation. The latter, however, refers to an ideological concept of oppression that Anglos have historically participated in. One of the authors, James Jennings, observes:

> [W]hiteness [is] a way of being in the world [that] has been parasitically joined [to] Christianity… To speak of whiteness is not to speak of a particular people but of people caught up in a deformed building project aimed at bringing the world to its full maturity…[Whiteness is] a formation that is yet compelling people to aim their lives toward a vision of maturity that is bound in death. I want to save us from becoming or being White people."[94]

In one of the essays, Andrew Draper outlines the goals of his paper with the following introduction:

> The purpose of this paper is to offer a few concrete practices in which White folks must engage to begin casting down our White idols. Towards this end, I will use language of decentering to describe the posture needed for White people as we engage in these spiritual disciplines. For whiteness as idolatry to be cast down, White identity (traditionally European particularities) must be decentered and not held as normative. Because White worshipers have centered ourselves in the economy of God's saving activity in the world, specific practices aimed at decentering White identity as universally normative constitute the best path toward tearing down the altars of whiteness. Because white supremacy is arguably the original sin of the West, the United States, and the church, we must speak of whiteness as an effective idolatry. While whiteness has historically been fashioned by White worshipers, its cultic power is such that all flesh may be tempted to render it homage.[95]

He then proposes five practices for white Christians to embrace in order to be re-disciplined along racial justice lines and saved from white supremacy:

---

[93] Ibid. 10–11.

[94] Ibid. 27, 28, 43.

[95] "The End of 'Mission': Christian Witness and the Decentering of White Identity" in *Can White People be Saved?* 178.

I propose five practices in which White folks must engage to resist the sociopolitical order of whiteness: first, repentance for complicity in systemic sin; second, learning from theological and cultural resources not our own; third, choosing to locate our lives in places and structures in which we are necessary guests; fourth, tangible submission to non-White ecclesial leadership; and fifth, hearing and speaking the glory of God in unfamiliar cadences. If… whiteness is a way of life into which its novitiates are discipled, then a Christian discipleship that entails a deconversion from whiteness is necessary if any true experience of reconciliation with God, others, the creation, and ourselves is to take place.[96]

What is important to see here is how the language of critical theory is being used and repurposed to describe Christian discipleship in the church. With such language, we must ask if this what the Bible envisions as essential to our discipleship with respect to racial tensions in the Church. Especially when the New Testament world was steeped in oppression, we must consider if any of the above strategies were considered essential—or even optional—in the pursuit of gospel-unity, reconciliation, or justice.

Moreover, as Neil Shenvi points out in his review of the book, it's interesting that whiteness is framed as an ideological concept, but then only people with white skin are the ones targeted throughout the book. His comments on this point are worth quoting at length:

The redefinition of the titular phrase "White people" is the most egregious example of doublespeak in the book. With regard to the question "Can 'White' people be saved?" the authors assure us that "yes, of course, all people, including those who have white skin, can be saved by the name of Jesus" (p. 14). But the authors make a distinction between "people with *white skin color* who can all be saved by Jesus like all other humans and the culture of *whiteness*" (p. 14)*.* They continue: "we maintain that this whiteness project (signified by our use of the phrase '*White' People* in the title) *cannot be saved!*" (p. 15).

Unfortunately, the English language doesn't work this way. We can't redefine the phrase "White people" to refer "the culture of whiteness" any more than we can redefine the phrase "athletic people" to refer to "the sports industry" or "female people" to refer to "the idea of femininity."

We also need to recognize that the authors *did* choose this title precisely because they *were* thinking about a particular group of people. Although they say that the value of whiteness can be "promoted… by people of any color" (p. 14), they immediately add that "We who have benefited economically, politically, and socially, are like that man lame from birth [in Acts 4] in need of walking again… we are lame because of the weight of the sins of the system that have accrued to us. We need the healing of Jesus to make us whole" (p. 15). Despite their insistence that "whiteness" is a condition in which all people can participate, the discussion predictably turns to how white-skinned people *in particular* are complicit in, blind to, and morally stained by "whiteness."[97]

In addition to this work seeking to incorporate the principles and concepts of Critical Theory into an evangelical response to racial injustice, Jemar Tisby, a Christian and President of *The Witness*, has become a prominent voice for many within the church. Jemar has done the church a great service in providing a historical account of racism and the church's complicity in it with his first book, *The Color of Compromise.* However, there are times with Jemar and *The Witness* directly employ concepts from Critical Theory that are out of step with the gospel and biblical teaching.

---

[96] Ibid. 181.

[97] "A Short Review of Sechrest's Can 'White' People Be Saved?," available at shenviapologetics.com

For example, The Witness engaged in a month-long prayer effort on Twitter during Black History Month. When they did this, they encouraged people to make specific prayers that used a combination of both biblical and Critical-Theory language. Consider the following statements:

> Day 15: Pray that God would open white people's eyes to their racism so that they can see how they engage in racism on a daily basis. We ask that God to [sic] bring conviction to their hearts, causing them to turn from their racism" (Eph. 1:17-18, James 4:8).

> Day 21: "We pray that God would bring conviction and repentance to our white brothers & sisters so that they can see the ways in which they are complicit in interpersonal and institutional racism."

Notice how these tweets assume the inherent nature of oppression through racism to be intrinsic to Anglo-Americans. Of course, a detailed argument for such a statement cannot be made on Twitter, but this assumption is highly contestable on its own. But these are the categories that Critical Theory operates in, painting with a broad brush and assuming the worst about those deemed in the oppressor class.

Tisby himself makes some troubling comments in his recent book, *How to Fight Racism.* Notice again how the assumption of pervasive racism is attached to people with white skin:

> White supremacy, of which racism is a component, constructs concentric circles with white people of European descent in the center, the place of privilege and importance, more financial wealth, and the presumption of innocence and normality. Outside of this central category are all other people of color…No matter how much Black people attempt to assimilate by adjusting their patterns of speech, style of dress, and social networks, blackness in a white supremacist society can always be weaponized at any moment as a tool of dehumanization…No matter their level of achievement, people of African descent in the United States, especially those with darker skin, are always situated in the outermost ring of American social circles. This is what a white-centered society looks like.[98]

> White people must constantly cultivate humility in order to acknowledge their complicity in racism and engage in the process of repentance and repair. Racism is designed to be invisible to white people–just the way things are, or this is the 'right' way to do things–so when they are confronted by the reality of racism, it can offend their sense of personal innocence. There is no way around this feeling. You have to go through a process of deconstructing the ways white supremacy has skewed your perception in order to see the reality of race more clearly.[99]

What is Tisby's solution to this? He continues:

> It is time for many of us to go home to the Black church or other ethnic-specific fellowships. The sad truth is that as long as there is racism in the white church there will always be a need for churches comprised primarily of racial and ethnic minorities. It is not about re-segregating ourselves, it is about gaining the strength to persevere as a person of color in a society enthralled by white supremacy.[100]

---

[98]Jemar Tisby, *How to Fight Racism*, 22.

[99] Ibid. 184–185.

[100] Ibid. 118.

Reading Jemar's advice here is, in some ways, sad because it's possible he had experiences with churches and Christians who didn't provide a safe space to talk about race and injustice without the issue becoming to offensive or political. George Yancey speaks about the critical importance of this one element in conversations about race—especially in the church. He notes:

> The lack of safe spaces to discuss racial issues in the secular world means that Christians should work harder to create safe places in our churches. People will be able to explore genuine answers instead of parroting secular models. Honest dialogue in a Christian setting is vital since our faith teaches us the role of human depravity in the development of racism. We will understand not only that people of other races may be insensitive to our perspective on racial issues, but that we may be insensitive to their perspective as well. When we humbly realize the implications of human depravity, we can work toward creating safe spaces necessary for racial healing…In the creation of safe spaces we can rid ourselves of the fears that drive racial mistrust. In safe spaces majority and ministry group members can take the potentially costly chances necessary to deal with racial alienation. Majority group members can overcome their fears that racial minorities will take advantage of their repentance. Minorities can overcome their fears that majority group members will dismiss racial concerns once minorities have extended forgiveness.[101]

Yes and Amen! Unfortunately, Jemar's approach here seems to shut down any room for disagreement or dissent concerning his approach to racism. In his framework, there are only those who are in favor of his approach or those who are against it and by implication, who are complicit in racism. This is intellectual totalitarianism—a creating of dogma around terms, concepts, and theories that are not required by Scripture or established by orthodox theology.

For many people, the problem with Jemar's terms, concepts, and theoretical basis have much in common with a critical social justice approach proposed by the many authors listed above. In that regard, criticism is more than warranted and doesn't render someone complicit in a racial caste system. In his previous book, Tisby seemed to shut down dissent along these vary lines when he said:

> The people who will reject this book will level several common objections. What stands out about these complaints is not their originality or persuasiveness but their ubiquity throughout history. The same arguments that perpetuated racial inequality in decades past get recycled in the present day. [Critics] will claim that a Marxist Communist ideology underlies all the talk about racial equality… They will assert that the historical facts are wrong or have been misinterpreted. They will charge that this discussion of race is somehow 'abandoning the gospel' and replacing it with problematic calls for 'social justice.' After reading just a few chapters, these arguments will sound familiar. These arguments have been used throughout the American church's history to deny or defend racism.[102]

Such an approach shut downs criticism and leaves people in fear of being labeled as defenders of racism, Because Tisby has rigged the discussion in such terms, critical dissent and engagement is impossible without incurring a negative label. Once again, Neil Shenvi is very helpful at summarizing the problems to this approach—especially in the church:

> There are several significant divides today within evangelicalism. Tisby would argue that one major divide is between "Complicit Christianity" and "Courageous Christianity," between those acquiescing to the racial status quo and those committed to fighting it. If he's right, his work is not creating this divide; it is merely revealing a divide that already exists.

---

[101] *Beyond Racial Gridlock,* 132.

[102] *The Color of Compromise,* 21.

In contrast, I'd argue that a more serious divide exists between evangelicals who increasingly view social reality through the lens of "systemic power dynamics" and those who don't. The majority of Christians abhor racism but also reject the various assumptions upon which Tisby's antiracist framework is built. This framework is highly influential not just in the church but in our culture as well, which explains Tisby's positive citations of Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*, Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be An Antiracist*, and Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*. If we adopt their perspective, compromise seems impossible because anything less than full-throated affirmation of antiracism is viewed as complicity in racial oppression.[103]

From these few examples, it is clear that some of the core tenants of Critical Theory are being employed by committed Christians in their attempt to pursue justice. The obsession with power and oppression, the assumption of race-based oppression as intrinsic to society, and the group-identity emphasis should make committed Christians pause when considering the application of such beliefs to practical strategies of justice.

George Yancey specifically observes how a predominately "white responsibility" model to address racial injustice is subject to serious criticism, especially when it mirrors the secular approach and becomes blind to the sins of minority group members. He observes:

> The Christian adaptation of this model does not display any substantial difference from the secular version. The way Christian advocates of white responsibility apply their ideas about sin does not differ much from the methods of the models secular proponents. Both aim to eliminate majority group advantage. Christian advocates of white responsibility are vulnerable to the same critiques as its secular adherents. For example, because Christian supporters of white responsibility focus on only the sins of the majority, they do not acknowledge how the sins of people of color contribute to racial conflict. White responsibility offers at best an incomplete blueprint for us to construct a satisfying solution for the sins of racism.[104]

In the church especially, we should be willing to address the nature of human sinfulness across individual lines—no matter what group-identity a person belongs to. At the same time, there should be serious concern with assigning "oppressor" and "oppressed" status to brothers and sisters who've been reconciled in Christ and who are actively sharing gospel-unity in the church.

Black and white Christians who are not living in an unjust relationship to each other (i.e. slavery) and who are actively sharing life together should be very hesitant to ascribe a specific group identity to each other when the individual nature of the relationship does not warrant such a status. Pat Sawyer helpfully notes:

> Setting aside spurious definitions of what constitutes oppression, this lens can lead one to believe that an 'oppressor' status is *intrinsic* to and *synonymous* with 'whiteness' and that an 'oppressed' status is *intrinsic* to and *synonymous* with 'blackness'. A number of Black intellectuals like Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, Larry Elder, John McWhorter, Glenn Loury, Thomas Chatterton Williams, and Coleman Hughes, among others have rightly expressed significant frustration and pushback against any victim status being resident in what it means to be Black. Notwithstanding the egregious racial history of the United States, the notion of an 'oppressor' status and 'oppressed' status being tied to whiteness and blackness respectively is patently false. It is a purblind contention that defies world history, not to mention anthropological and ontological reality. There are no immutable or permanent attributes assigned to whiteness and blackness along the vector of privilege and oppression. Such a view is an assault on

---

[103] Neil Shenvi, "A House Divided: A Review of Tisby's How To Fight Racism," available at shenviapologetics.com

[104] *Beyond Racial Gridlock,* 73.

Christian identity and an insurmountable obstacle to Christian unity. Moreover, it is an affront to God who made ALL people in HIS image. In addition, confusion here can lead to erroneous views regarding sin, guilt, and corporate repentance where all modern whites are regarded as complicit in the racial sins of some historical whites. Such factitious claims are an offense and provocation to the biblical understanding of [sin] and the Imago Dei and will be a non-starter to Christian unity.[105]

Speaking of unity of the church, Rosaria Butterfield provides some very helpful insight. Her words are worth quoting at length:

Intersectionality produces never-ending social division and fragmentation. This is ironic, because when intersectionality first appeared in U.S. universities in the 1990s, it was hoped that it would challenge the idea that dominant and oppressive social groups are easily identifiable. Instead, it multiplied social groups and attributed to them an invented reality, leaving us with a culture of identity politics on steroids.

…

These contradictions to the creation ordinance violate both love of neighbor and common sense. Intersectionality claims to create community, but the community it creates is fractured, victim-minded, angry, and inconsolable. This is the exact opposite of the community created by the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; Gal. 5:22–23). When intersectionality joins efforts with the gospel, it leaves us with an immature faith, a false hope, and a deceptive vocabulary.

Intersectionality confuses justice, a command of God to defend the poor and the needy (Mic. 6:8), with a conception of justice not defined by Scripture. Biblically speaking, sin causes suffering, and even oppressed people need soul care in addition to body care because oppressed people are sinners in need of a Savior too. Sin produces suffering, both our own sin and the sin of others that hurts us. The order between sin and suffering matters. Miss this point or change the order and you have bypassed the entire gospel.

As Elizabeth C. Corey has pointed out, the departure point for intersectionality is a debatable but never-debated set of ever-expanding personal qualities that constitute identity and personhood: age, race, class, sex, sexuality, gender identity, weight, attractiveness, feelings, phobias—the list goes on. Heading out in the wrong direction guarantees arriving at the wrong place, and that is the unintended fruit of intersectionality in the church. The church's embrace of intersectionality as an analytical tool was intended to give voice to the voiceless. But the victimized identities that emerge from intersectionality are perpetually immature and in constant need of therapy and affirmation.

God-fearing churches take violence and oppression seriously. A God-fearing church takes church membership, personal accountability, and church discipline seriously, too, because these things are connected. An oppressed person's best defense against true violence is membership in a Bible-believing church, one that practices both hospitality and church discipline, one that protects the sheep from the wolves by driving the wolves out the door. Intersectionality banks on the power of human words, but justice for the oppressed comes by the power of the gospel.

Churches and parachurch organizations should be aware: intersectionality will not serve the gospel. It will not help you become kinder, more aware of the world around you, or better able to deal with diversity. Rather, it will introduce a new set of false virtues and false vices into your

---

[105]"Cautions Regarding CRT," *Christianity Today,* March 4, 2021.

ministry. Take heed to your ministry. Paul's first epistle to Timothy tells us how: he calls our pastors and elders to be examples of righteousness (1 Tim. 4:12), to "give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (v. 13, NKJV), to not neglect the gifts of teaching (v. 14), to "meditate on these things [and] give yourself entirely to them," and to "take heed to yourself and to the doctrine" (v. 15). [106]

All of this is to say that followers of Jesus must be careful how we evaluate secular approaches to justice when we seek to incorporate them into our personal strategies. This doesn't mean there is nothing we can learn from such philosophies and strategies, but only that Scripture must be the ultimate authority by which we measure everything.

When we place Scripture at the center, we see that the claims of Critical Theory are often inconsistent with a gospel-centered approach to unity and justice that Jesus came to give His life for. As a result, we still believe in the Common Grace given to all people—even critical theorists—and will utilize their claims that are shown by Scripture and other disciplines to be true statements about reality. But at the core level, the fundamental tenants and principles articulated by leading critical theorists seem to be incompatible with a distinctly Christian approach to racial unity and justice.

---

[106] "Intersectionality and the Church." It's worth noting that Rosaria's article specifically addresses how Intersectionality is applied to sex and gender. We believe her comments here reveal the ideological nature and theological consequences of employing intersectionality in the pursuit of justice, regardless of which social sphere one seeks to engage in.

## F. Conclusion

In providing this position paper, we want to re-emphasize that our criticism of this secular model is not a criticism of the need to pursue justice. Such a call (to pursue justice) is a biblical command, not a biblical option for followers of Jesus. Instead, our goal in this paper has been to provide clarity on a confusing subject that is so prevalent in the national conversation around race relations today. Moreover, we have sought to provide a biblical evaluation of Critical Theory in order to aid Christians in thinking theologically and practically about this issue.

With this in mind, we still believe in the necessity of cultivating empathy and compassion for people across racial lines. We still believe in the necessity of "rejoicing with those who rejoice" and "weeping with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). Furthermore, we still believe the church has the best resources for dealing with the issues of racial injustice, because we have the gospel of Jesus Christ, which has the longest precedent for tearing down walls of injustice and separation between people groups (Ephesians 2:10–3:6) and will continue to do so until the New Heavens and New Earth are established (Revelation 5:9; 7:9).

Until Jesus comes back, we will proactively pursue justice and racial unity in our church. Furthermore, we will equip our members to think Biblically and practically about such matters. In the process, we will not always agree with the preferred political ideology that controls the narrative of the day or our local context. Instead, we will do our best to align our convictions and our practices with Scripture, believing that Gods word is truly  sufficient to lead us and guide us in this area.

Because of this commitment, we believe we must reject the core tenants of Critical Theory in our pursuit of justice. While we acknowledge and embrace their claims that are consistent with Scripture, history, and other disciplines, we also reject what we see to be unbiblical categories that would ultimately destroy Christ-centered unity in the church and disrupt our efforts to pursue Biblical justice.

In the end, we believe Jesus calls us to be a people of both "good news" and "good works." The Scriptures make it clear that we should believe and preach the gospel of Christ ("good news") while being a people committed to ministry of justice and compassion ("good works"). The Scriptures do not call us, nor do they give us the option, to choose between these two options. The former is how people get saved; the latter is what saved people do. Not either/or, but both/and. At Stonegate, we want to be a both/and people, but that requires us to measure everything by the Scriptures and be committed to Jesus' vision of justice above all else.

We will not always get this right and we will make mistakes along the way, but our commitment is to be faithful to the Scriptures—no matter the cost.