

## “Guard the deposit entrusted to you”

### Introduction

Paul wrote to Timothy:

- 1 Timothy 6:20–21 — O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.

There are many sincere professing Christians today who are in danger of swerving from the faith. There are many who are being deceived by what is falsely called “knowledge.” The goal of this message is to equip us to guard that precious deposit of the true Gospel that has been entrusted to us. As an alumnus of Moody Bible Institute, I recently received this notification:

“We [at MBI] have now formed an interdepartmental, comprehensive task force on race... The task force has been charged with the following two major objectives: To carefully examine our history in order to understand our past sins and mistakes with the purpose of determining what impact, if any, this history has had on Moody systemically. To analyze the current ministry of Moody Bible Institute in order to make sure we are reflecting God’s values when it comes to all racial issues.”

What exactly does this mean? Why is it only now, after nearly 140 years of history as a school, that Moody is beginning to seek out this understanding of its past sins – or the sins of its past leaders? Why is it only now that a task force has finally been formed to make sure Moody is reflecting God’s values when it comes to all racial issues? The answer is in that trendy word, “woke.” Moody has been awakened to realities of sin and racism that it had previously been asleep to—or unconscious of—for the past 140 years. In the same way that Moody has been awakened, so also the church is experiencing an “awakening.” Two years ago, now, Moody Press published a book by Eric Mason entitled “Woke Church.” After 2000 years of church history and at least 6000 years of redemptive history, God’s people are finally being awakened to a form of racism that—though it’s existed since the beginning of time—has not until this very moment in the life of the church been recognized or confessed. I’m not being sarcastic here. Neither am I denying that Christians can very *often* be blinded to their own racism or that the sin of racism can be institutionalized in racist cultural norms and laws. But the church has always known this – even in the midst of its own sin and failure. Even Moody Bible Institute has always known this. This is simply the clear teaching and application of Scripture. What we’re dealing with here (we’re told) is a form of racism that’s existed since the beginning of the world, but that until this century—until this period of awakening and being “woke”—the church was completely oblivious to and unaware of. Shouldn’t this sound suspicious to us?

Especially in the wake of the death of George Floyd, many sincere and well-intentioned Christians have been hash tagging “Black Lives Matter,” posting much of the messaging of “Black Lives Matter,” and even joining in some of the protests connected with “Black Lives Matter.” Many of these Christians are far more pleasing to God than the Christians who self-righteously judge and condemn them for “compromise.” Nevertheless, sometimes in spite of the

right motives we can do the wrong things. In spite of the right motives we can do things that are misguided and unhealthy and ultimately dangerous to me and to the church and to the true Gospel. In spite of the right motives, we can be deceived.

So why is it that for 6000 years the “church” was never “woke,” but now it is? Why is it that for 6000 years the church was blind, but only now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, does it see? This “awakening” in the church is not built on a fresh understanding of Scripture, or on some new divine revelation, but rather on a worldly philosophy that is hellbent on destroying the church and perverting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The so-called “wokeness” of the church today is founded *entirely* on a worldly way of thinking that’s called “critical theory.” In other words, what Christians are doing today is rereading and reinterpreting the Scriptures through the contemporary lens of critical theory. Most Christians are doing this unconsciously, without even knowing what critical theory is, and so they sincerely believe that their fight against racism is rooted in the Scriptures. The problem is that when we interpret Scripture through the lens of “critical theory” we’ve already surrendered the Gospel itself – we’ve already opened the gates wide to the enemy.

### **“Philosophy and Empty Deceit”**

Paul writes in Colossians:

- Colossians 2:8 — See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world...

#### **I. The first pillar of Critical Theory**

What is critical theory? Neil Shenvi explains that critical theory is based on four central ideas. The first idea is that there are two different classes or groups to which everyone in society belongs – the privileged dominant group and the underprivileged oppressed group. In critical theory this is a way of viewing the world (worldview). It’s the lens through which we see and interpret every individual in the world. In other words, we can only understand the individual by understanding the group to which he/she belongs – *either* the dominant, privileged, oppressor group, *or* the oppressed, underprivileged group. There’s no other option.

So what is it that determines your group membership? Maybe some of us are already uncomfortable here. You don’t want to be *told* what group you’re in. You would like some choice in the matter. But critical theory doesn’t give you that choice. So what is it that determines your group membership? This brings us to the second central idea behind critical theory.

#### **II. The second pillar of Critical Theory**

What is oppression? Oppression is when the values and ideas of one group are imposed on another group. Since America was founded by white men, it’s an inescapable fact that white men must belong to the oppressor group because it’s their norms, values, and ideas that have been woven into the very fabric of the societal system in which we all live and move and breath. This is what critical theory means by “*systemic* oppression” or even “*systemic* racism.” It’s not what

we usually mean by oppression or racism. It's not what the Bible means by oppression or racism. Here, oppression is not individual acts or even specific unjust laws; instead, the very air that we breathe in America is oppressive (or oppressing). It can't be any other way. It's the entire system upon which society itself has been built because what this system *is*, by default, is simply the imposition of the norms, values, and ideas of "old white men" – which means that all white men today automatically have an unfair privileged advantage over everyone else.

But, of course, critical theory does recognize that things aren't quite so simple. What about a man who's black? As a man, he would be in the oppressor group—the sexist group. It doesn't matter if he's not actually bigoted or chauvinist as an individual. He's simply part of that oppressor group. He partakes without any choice in that privileged advantage of being a man in a male dominated society and so the air of oppression is the air he breathes. He is an oppressor—not necessarily a bad or a mean man (critical theory admits that), but still an oppressor and therefore "guilty"—by the simple fact that he's a man and part of the oppressor "*group*." On the other hand, since he's also black in a society dominated by "white" values and ideas ("whiteness"), he's also automatically oppressed. He can't help but be oppressed because this oppression is once again the air that he breathes.

We could say the same thing about a homosexual white man. He is both oppressed and oppressor and where these three different identities intersect (homosexual and white and male) is where he comes to understand who he truly is. That's intersectionality and "identity politics." A poor, heterosexual, black woman needs to understand where these four different identities (three of them "oppressed" [classism, racism, sexism] and one "oppressor" [heterosexism]) at some point intersect to create the human being that she truly is. That's intersectionality and "identity politics."

### **III. The third pillar of Critical Theory**

This emphasis on identity markers that are all outward and external—identity markers that automatically separate me and isolate me from most of the rest of the world—creates a situation where no one else can "know" as I know. Common knowledge is built on the assumption of a *common identity* and therefore a common way of knowing (rational thought). But critical theory for all practical purposes denies any universal, common, human identity (identity politics), and so it teaches that the only way we can truly know anything is through our lived experience at that intersection of who we really are. Can you see where that leaves us? An oppressor perceives all of reality through the lens of his identity as an oppressor and so his knowledge is false. A white man—even a sincere and well-meaning white man—can't be trusted and should never trust himself because he can't possibly know the truth as the oppressed know the truth.

So we read on the Black Lives Matter website: "We are unapologetically Black in our *positioning*. In affirming that Black Lives Matter, we need not qualify our *position*." Do you see how they just shut down any disagreement? It's impossible to know the truth unless you've positioned yourself to see all of reality from the "black" perspective (black positioning). But what if a black person doesn't believe that he or she is oppressed? Well, then, as Biden would say, he's not really black. Critical theory, on the other hand, would say he's experiencing internalized oppression – he's breathed so much of the air of oppression that he no longer knows

he's oppressed. He is not yet "woke" to his oppression even as most whites are not yet "woke" to the fact that they are oppressors.

#### **IV. The fourth pillar of Critical Theory**

To sum up: Critical theory divides all of humankind into the two categories of either oppressor or oppressed (cf. intersectionality and identity politics). Critical theory defines oppression as the dominance of one set of ideas, norms, values over another (enshrined in cultural norms and laws) even if those ideas, norms, and values are not *in and of themselves* oppressive according to the traditional definition. Critical theory assumes that "lived experience" in the oppressed group is the only pathway to true knowledge about reality and about the world. And finally, critical theory believes in social justice – fighting for liberation from all forms of social oppression; fighting to liberate all oppressed groups from the tyranny of the *ideas* and *values* of the dominant group.

#### **V. Critical theory in action**

So let's consider the death of George Floyd on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020. George Floyd was a black man. Derek Chauvin was a white man (and a white man whose profession is to enforce the laws of the dominant group in society). Therefore, by virtue of their group identity—by virtue of their belonging to their respective oppressed and oppressor groups—this was automatically a manifestation of systemic racist oppression. There was no other possibility. And so Christians and non-Christians alike took to social media and to the streets in protest. But we have to ask what, really, were people protesting? Critical theory would say that's a "white" question, even a white male question. Critical theory would shame us into silence. But we do have to ask the rational question: "What, really, were people protesting?" Were they protesting Derek Chauvin *as an individual*? Were they protesting Chauvin's racist *heart*? If so, how did they conclude his heart was racist? Were they protesting a specific law that discriminated against blacks? Were they protesting a failure to properly investigate Floyd's death and do what is just? No. They were protesting the air that we breathe in America and the oppressive dominance of all the values and all the ideas of old white men. Chauvin's knee on Floyd's neck was simply the symbol of the oppression of "whiteness."

Critical theory (which is the bedrock of Black Lives Matter both as an organization and as a movement) doesn't ultimately care about the individual. Critical theory (BLM) doesn't ultimately care about George Floyd. But the death of George Floyd served as the opportunity to subtly indoctrinate people (including well-meaning Christians) with its teachings about group identity and oppression. The issue for critical theory is not Chauvin's knee on Floyd's neck or the fact that Floyd died (that's secondary and peripheral); the issue is Chauvin's whiteness and Floyd's blackness (which automatically guaranteed that this could not possibly be anything other than a manifestation of *systemic* racist oppression even before any investigation was made or the facts were all known). We can see that this is the case when we consider that a video of a "doctor" dismembering a defenseless baby would be suppressed and ignored by the same people protesting the death of George Floyd. Why is this? Because for critical theory, the *killing* of a baby is *not* oppression. To the contrary, it's the denial of a woman's right to have her baby aborted that *is* oppression because this is an *idea/value* of that dominant class of old white men

with a Judeo-Christian ethic being imposed on others. Of course, this idea in and of itself is what is truly racist.

Are you beginning to see how critical theory works? And are you beginning to see that Christians in the church must be, by definition, the ultimate oppressors? Or perhaps we should really say that in the world of critical theory—and in the world of Black Lives Matter,” the God of the Bible is the true and the ultimate oppressor.

### **How the Bible dispels the darkness of critical theory**

Paul writes in Colossians:

- Colossians 2:8 — See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, **and not according to Christ.**

#### **I. What the Bible teaches about our identity**

The Bible teaches that our identity is not found in how much property we own (or don't own), in our sexuality, in our biological gender, in the color of our skin, or at any point where all of these identity markers intersect. The Bible teaches that our identity is found in the reality that we are all human beings made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), that we're all sinners in need of mercy and deliverance from the wrath to come (Rom. 3:23), and that we can all find this salvation only through Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 4:12). This is an identity that is common to us all and that puts us all together into the same group – masters with slaves, men with women, whites with blacks with Asians with Hispanics with Native American's, etc. So in Paul's day (in the church) the master and his slave would sit down as equals—even as brothers—at the Lord's table and still remain master and slave because “master” and “slave” did not determine their identity (Philemon 10-18; 1 Tim. 6:1-2; Eph. 6:5-9). A husband and his wife were equal heirs together of the grace of life even as they were called to the roles of loving headship and fearless submission because gender did not determine their identity (1 Pet. 3:1-7). As Paul says in Galatians and in Colossians:

- Galatians 3:28 — There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- Colossians 3:11 — Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Can you see how this is the death of critical theory, of identity politics, and of intersectionality? Can you see why “Black Lives Matter” so hates and loathes true Christianity and the church as the ultimate enemy? Critical theory thrives on pitting groups against one another – on pitting the “oppressed” against their ideological “oppressors” and so while Black Lives Matter calls for an end to “systemic racism” it's only seeking all the while to preserve and perpetuate true racism in a bid for power. And yet there are many professing Christians who read their Bible through the lens of critical theory and therefore see support for “identity politics” in the Bible. Consider this verse from Revelation:

- Revelation 5:9 (cf. Rev. 7:9) — They sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

Some have concluded from this that God has chosen people based in part on their color and ethnicity – because it was important to God that this specific color be represented in heaven. Therefore, it’s alright—in fact, it’s essential—to say that my *identity* is not just a Christian, but a “black Christian” or a “white Christian” (or even in today’s “church” a non-practicing “gay Christian”). Therefore, I must ask what “blackness” means and what “whiteness” means and I must constantly be aware of and celebrate (or possibly even be warned by) my “positioning” as either a “black Christian” or a “white Christian” in the church. Do you see how this contradicts the clear Gospel teaching that we have only one true identity and that’s our identity in Christ where there is no black or white, no male or female, no slave or free? Do you see how this undermines the Gospel and actually *creates* true racism under the guise of “biblical” racial reconciliation? Indeed, the point of Revelation 5:9 is not at all a celebration of the distinct categories of the redeemed (Rev. 11:9; 13:7; 14:6), but of the impartiality and the universality of redemption irrespective of race, color, or ethnicity. I’m afraid that Moody’s task force on race is set up from the beginning for failure. It is almost certainly, in and of itself, biblically racist.

## **II. What the Bible teaches about “oppression”**

The Bible contradicts not only critical theory’s understanding of our “identity” but also of what oppression really is. Critical theory says that oppression is the imposition of the values or ideas of one group upon another via societal and cultural norms even if those values and ideas are not in and of themselves oppressive. In other words, critical theory redefines oppression so that the group whose ideas have shaped the culture and society is by definition an unjust oppressor of all those who don’t belong to that group. In this way, oppression is culturally and sociologically defined, while in the Bible oppression is defined according to universally understood standards of moral law. For instance, according to critical theory to limit or outlaw abortion is unjust oppression (it’s racist and it’s sexist) because that’s imposing the idea of one group (old white males) upon another (remember that there are many [such as blacks who oppose abortion] who are said to have internalized this oppression). The Bible, however, says that it’s abortion that’s oppressive because it’s the taking of an innocent life. According to critical theory, a refusal to legalize and affirm *and celebrate* homosexual “marriage” is oppressive (it’s racist and sexist) because it’s imposing the idea of one group upon another. The Bible, however, says that legalizing homosexual “marriage” is oppressive because it institutionalizes the destruction of the family as the foundational building block of society. Nevertheless, there are multitudes of Christians today who are simply assuming that the Bible’s definition of oppression is the same as that of the world around us. There are multitudes of Christians today who are reading their Bible through the lens of critical theory (without even knowing what critical theory is or that this is what they’re doing). They naively (that is not intended as an insult) assume that the marginalized and the oppressed that we read about in the Bible are equivalent to the groups that our culture today has identified as marginalized and oppressed when in many cases nothing could be further from the truth (cf. the biblical context of the covenant community).

### **III. What the Bible teaches about accountability, freedom, and truth**

The Bible contradicts critical theory's understanding not only of "identity" and of what oppression actually is, but also everything else about critical theory.

While critical theory teaches one's involuntary membership in a group (and therefore an unavoidable guilt by membership in that group) the Bible teaches individual and personal accountability ("The soul who sins shall die... the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself"; Ezek. 18:20).

While critical theory tries to force upon multitudes of unwilling people the identity and therefore the mentality of being oppressed victims, the Bible tells Christian slaves (*bondservants*) to think of themselves always as freedmen of the Lord while the free are always to remember that they are slaves (*bondservants*) of Christ (1 Cor. 7:20-22). This mentality and mindset kills the whole agenda of Black Lives Matter.

While critical theory teaches us that truth and reality is whatever the oppressed say it is, the Bible teaches us that truth and reality is whatever God says it is ("Thus says the Lord..."). For Critical Theory and Black Lives Matter these words are the ultimate form of oppression and no amount of violence should be spared to throw off that yoke.

Critical theory teaches us that since rational thought often contradicts people's lived experience its conclusions cannot be trusted; but the Bible is built upon the assumption that rational thought is a part of our common, shared identity as human beings made in the image of God – the God who says to us, "Come now, let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18).

### **Conclusion**

Brothers and sisters, we are called to love and to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 1:16), and in loving and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to hate and to expose and to reject every counterfeit (cf. Gal. 1:8-9). To *love* the true Gospel is the key that must guard us against a self-righteous judgmentalism.

Today, there are many "Christian" leaders, Christian publishers, Christian institutions, and Christian churches who are telling us that there are some places where critical theory and biblical Christianity are in harmony. They're telling us that there are some ways that critical theory can help us to think more biblically and to be more faithful Christians. Hence, a book titled "Woke Church." Hence, the commitment to examining our history to understand the sins of past men and women and their impact *systemically* on institutions and on the church. Hence, the expectation that Christians *should* all be proclaiming louder than anyone else as a matter of moral duty: "Black Lives Matter." But the reality is that critical theory is from start to finish an assault on the reconciling, unifying, peace-making, saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The "wokeness" of the church today is nothing less than the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge. Therefore I reject "Black Lives Matter" because it *is* the true language of oppression. I reject "Black Lives Matter" because it *is* the true language of racism. It is an insult to all of my brothers and sisters in Christ who are black. I reject "Black Lives Matter"

because those words—and any and all substitutes for those words—are irredeemable in our cultural context. I reject “Black Lives Matter” ultimately because those words are the banner for a philosophy that will be satisfied with nothing less than the destruction of the church whether by force from outside the church or by the subversion and perversion of the Gospel from within the church. May we all together reject “Black Lives Matter” and all that those words stand for in our present cultural context (the organization and the movement and the philosophy and ideal) because by God’s grace alone, we have come to love the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the reconciled, redeemed community that has been created—and is still being created—by that Gospel.

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