

V. Progressive Christianity in Biblical Perspective
Historic Biblical Christianity and Contemporary Progressive Christianity
“Progressive Christianity and Critical Theory”

Ephesians 4:11–16

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

July 11, 2021 • Evening Sermon

I Timothy 1:1–7 says [1] *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, [2] To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*

[3] *As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, [4] nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. [5] The aim of our (preachers and teachers) charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. [6] Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, [7] desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.*

Prayer:

Father, we thank You for these moments in Your Word and also addressing this issue that has worked its way into the fabric of our culture pervasively and also even into the evangelical church persistently and even within the PCA doggedly. Please give us understanding to deal with this Biblically from a historic Christian world and life view that is focused upon Christ, framed by the Word of God and that is embraced by the power and ministry of the Spirit of God. I pray for the glory of God, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

In this study we will look at Critical theory in this series. I want to review a little bit. One of the things that became obvious to me is that there were certain anti-Gospel teaching that was working its way into the evangelical church in a very powerful and destructive way and has been making inroads into my own beloved denomination, the PCA. Examples of this teaching are Side B theology in terms of dealing with addictive sexual sins that are besetting in the life of a Christian and what it means to be above reproach in ordination. Then there are issues of Critical theory and its subsets that come with it.

It was almost like a light came on for me when I was doing a deep dive into J. Gresham Machen's book, Christianity and Liberalism, which I have found so helpful and have been through it about four or five times now. I had been doing a conference and took a couple of extra days for study and was actually staying in the home of J. Gresham Machen's grandfather, in the very room Machen used to stay in as a child when he came to visit his grandfather. I was also going through the book by Machen titled Things Unseen: A Systematic Introduction to the Christian Faith and Reformed Theology and his beloved colleagues' biography on Machen. Theologically, Progressive Christianity is not promoting what we would call liberal theology but progressive theology.

Here is what became obvious to me while doing my study on this. We could go around looking at all the issues out there like Critical Theory, Critical Race theory, Critical Law theory, Intersectionality, Side B, Side A and all these things that keep coming our way, which need to be addressed which is why I'm doing this series, but we also have to understand what lifts or opens

the doors for these things to come in – what is it that gives them traction. The 21st century manifestation of (contemporary) Progressive Christianity was cut from the same bolt of cloth as the 19th and 20th century liberal Christianity. Both have the same motivation where Liberal Christianity promises to rescue the church due to the modern mind not tolerating the anachronistic and acclaims of Biblical Christianity so they wanted to rescue the church from cultural irrelevance. More than that they were going to adopt a new mission which would be cultural transformation. As we moved into the 21st century there were publications around this known as the Christian Century. This movement came into mainline Protestant Churches hoping to usher in a post millennial utopia that would answer all the brokenness of our culture.

What is the result? It is inevitable for whatever becomes your functional motivation and mission will eventually determine your message. It was just a matter of time in order to be culturally relevant and a player in cultural transformation that the church had to engage in cultural accommodation in its message. The modern mind could not accept things like the Incarnation, the resurrection, the exclusivity of Christ and salvation, and the atoning death on the cross for those things have no resonance in the modern mind. They would reinterpret this to instead of a sin saving Gospel, it becomes a social gospel that will be the remedy to cure the ills of the day economically, demographically and politically. So, their new Christianity has gone through and vacuumed out anything that is foundational to Christianity, supernatural or talks of a holy God who creates the way for sinful men to be right with God because of His grace and mercy and any attendant doctrine to that. Thus, the result became liberal theology.

What is the motivation of progressive Christianity? It is the very same branding of liberal theology where they are going to rescue the evangelical church so what is at stake now is no longer the Protestant church, interestingly, because of liberalism the mainline Protestant church is now on the dustbin of history. It's empty, it's gone. It is in the trajectory of oblivion. Now Satan has put his eyes on the evangelical church which thrived in contrast to the mainline church, because it would not abandon the authority, supremacy, sufficiency and the inerrancy of God's Word or historic Christianity. Progressive Christianity is telling the evangelical church to get on the right side of history due to the fact that your children are going to college and they are not coming back and you will not win the next generation so we are going to rescue you. Again, their motivation isn't to destroy, just like liberal Christianity but that's the end result. Their motivation is that they will save it through cultural transformation – redeem the city, seek the welfare of the city.

Isn't redeeming and seeking the welfare of the city Biblical terms? Yes, but they have to be interpreted in their Biblical context and not by the context of the culture but by what the Word of God says. In this series we have already looked at the redeeming of the city of Ephesus and Samaria and they got redeemed, not by the social or political movement of the church but by the church staying on mission, on message and in ministry. In Samaria, it says they preached Jesus and the Jews and Gentiles believed and the city was glad (Acts 8:4–8). In Ephesus they rooted out the industries of idolatry because of the growing work of Christianity and the demise of idolatry. The cities were turned around and upside down, in fact it says the world was turned upside down (Acts 17:6) and it wasn't because Paul was out to lead the church in its missionary endeavors but it was because he went out to turn sinners right side up and the world is a consequence.

I'm all for church growth, more converts, more missionaries but if these things become the mission of the church, then you will get a pragmatic gospel for the statistical growth. If self-esteem (feeling good about one's self) becomes the mission then the church will have a

therapeutic gospel. If helping to make people successful is the mission of the church then the church will have a prosperity gospel. The motivation and the mission eventually will determine the message. So, what do we have now? We don't have a regurgitation of liberal theology but we have an establishment of progressive theology. They are not attacking the inerrancy of the Word but they are attacking the sufficiency of the Word. Therefore, all these tools from the culture are being brought in because they think the Gospel isn't sufficient to set sinners free and change their lives. They think the Gospel isn't sufficient to help with racism which I prefer to call ethnic discrimination, but it opens the door for it so in they come and they get trajectory.

So, we are seeing the evangelical church folding just like the mainline protestant church did because of the adulteration and eventually the apostasy of the message and now cultural accommodation is happening again. We want to be known as 'with it' and we do not want to be called names by the culture or be cancelled by the culture for we want a seat at the table with the culture shapers. Instead of bringing our calling to bear upon the world – on mission, make disciples, on message where the Gospel is leading the whole counsel of God, and in ministry of worship, evangelism, enfolding and discipleship – these other things have come in. In the last study I looked more specifically at Side B and in this study I want to look more specifically at Critical theory.

I would recommend reading Voddie Baucham, Jr.'s book Fault Lines and if you prefer not to read you can watch his lectures on YouTube. They are well done and easily digestible. So, what is Critical theory? It is a social and philosophical movement into the pulpits of the evangelical church and even into certain pulpits of the PCA. It is religious in essence and it is a religion. It evangelizes, disciples and proselytizes. It creates celebrity worship and it promises to be the answer to man's problem in this world. It is a social, political and religious movement and it has its world view that it incessantly and persistently propagates.

Where did Critical theory come from? It has quite the history and goes all the way back to a philosopher by the name of Hegel (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich). Hegel developed this philosophy called dialectical materialism. In other words, it is two sides (dialectical) and materialism where all of life is matter – there is no metaphysical or spiritual. This is what religious people have used as a power tool to control you. Forget that, for the only thing there is, is what you see. The premise of dialectical materialism is a world view that is wrapped up with Hegel's analysis of a thesis and every time there is a thesis there is an antithesis – and the thesis and the antithesis cannot stand without conflict so they war with each other and upon their battle out comes a synthesis.

When I first started studying this in graduate school, I remember being taught this in a Civics class. When a thesis and an antithesis create a synthesis that automatically creates a new antithesis to the synthesis which is the new thesis. So that will enter into a new conflict and the cycle repeats itself which is then known as the cycle of life. A man named Charles Darwin gets his hands on this and takes it to interpret the world view of the data of science. There is species, then mutation and the mixing of the two and out comes a new species which would create a mutation, an antithesis which creates another species, etc. Unfortunately for Darwin the evidence doesn't support that but that was how he interpreted the evidence. A man named Karl Marx applies Hegel's concept to economics and then men like Lenin and others applied Hegel to politics. Marx now says that all of life is a power struggle – a class struggle. There are the bourgeoisie (the haves) and the proletariat (the have nots) and the bourgeoisie control the proletariat or the capitalists control the workers. You are going to have conflicts.

In science, it was called evolution. In Marxism, it's called revolution. Eventually you will have an economic revolution which will have political overtones so with a guy like Lenin and others there was a political version of this. Marx says socialism is the answer and the only thing that can give it order is an authoritarian government and that then gives rise to communism – where we will take care of the production of society, the distribution of wealth. We don't create wealth we distribute wealth. We don't believe in equality for the government will determine equity. Does any of that sound familiar to you? That is exactly what was behind those three movements of evolution, revolution for the purpose of socialism as an economic movement and communism which becomes the authoritarian state to control as everyone now has to invest in the collective. That was going to take over the world. That system did not take over for it will not work and cannot work. Just as Darwin had his black box to try and hide everything in so Marx and Lenin had to hide their black box which was corruption, famine, poverty, police state and hundreds of millions of death and that was by political incarceration and torture.

I'm not giving a political speech here but Reagan saw it coming in the 1960s and 70s. We're the ones who create pies, we don't divide them up. We'll take the pies and put the pressure on and they can't stand the pressure. He knew there would be an economic collapse so he would up the anti. The followers of socialism and communism were not going to give up that easy to the point they said the only problem they had was they had the wrong system – they thought they had the right world view but the wrong divisions. The issue is power struggle, but it's not the bourgeoisie (the haves) and the proletariat (the have nots), for it's the white race and the other races. Now instead of a class struggle, it becomes a race based struggle and a whole new thinking of Hegel's dialectic materialism went into place under a rubric called the Frankfurt School.

Frankfurt is all over for it refers to certain gatherings of social and political scientists who were absolutely committed to spreading international communism, which was collapsing everywhere. So how will they spread? They have to rethink it and find a different way. It's not going to come through workers revolt for that won't work. It will come though with racial and ethnic enmity and breeding despair to the point that the only thing that can be embraced is in fact revolution. So they move from class to race – polarization and division – and that will become the way to introduce a revolution where you will need a socialism for the distribution of goods for equity purposes and an authoritarian communist state in order to oversee and enforce that distribution.

The Frankfurt school coming out party was two-fold. One, is they went into the academic world and they found ready converts. The converts from the radicals from the 1960s were ready to embrace this new theory of Critical theory and then they sought to implement it at every level of education in our country starting in the 1960s. Then they labeled it the Critical turn, the turn to Critical theory. The previous radicals put on a coat and tie, went into the classroom, got their PhD and began to teach it. The number one entry point was English literature, then the arts and then into the other disciplines. And they began to be successful. The second way it came out was in the Civil Rights Movement. There they did not meet much success or as much but they certainly tried. They tried through various movements, such as a revolutionary movement of militant groups in the 1960s and then they tried it through the church for they knew the evangelical church in the African American society had to be side lined so they began to develop what is known as Black Liberation theology.

With Black Liberation theology and the infiltration and multiplication of militant groups they were going to take over the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. They just met one

problem and his name was Martin Luther King. Martin Luther King said he was not going to do that and what I'm about to say is not promoting King but like every hero I've ever known he has his warts and pimples, but I do want to honor him and that is why I give out the book Annotations on a Letter That Changed the World from a Birmingham Jail by Peter Lillback. I highly commend this for reading. Martin Luther King said 'we are going to fight this Biblically and constitutionally, that what is being done with Jim Crow laws and Civil Rights (retardations) have to be met for they are inconsistent' and thus came his statement 'I long for the world where it will not be the color of your skin but the content of your character.' Most leaders are ashamed of that statement, won't quote this and refuse to embrace this in today's modern movements. King, personally with his leadership, in my humble opinion, thwarted the success of the Critical theory movement. They were successful in the academic world in the 1960s but they lost on the streets because of Martin Luther King and those who surrounded him. Some of them are still living in our own community today.

What does Critical theory begin to promote? Critical theory has its subsets. First of all, there is Critical race theory in which it pitches races where it associates oppression and discrimination, not as a spiritual issue in the heart but in the DNA of someone's skin. Thus, whiteness always leads to discrimination. Thus, the scorecard of Critical race theory is intersectionality, which is rating people in terms of the oppressions that have been inflicted upon them. There was an interesting situation in the present administration that basically was using intersectionality to identify oppressed groups. So, if you're a white man you're not oppressed so you don't create a place for that person, but a white female has one mark of oppression and that is that she is a female. A black female would have two marks of oppression. Then if you're a transgender black female you could have three marks of oppression or more. That's a no win game because there is always someone who is a little more oppressed than you and when the government appoints you, then you hear 'why didn't you appoint them for they were more oppressed.'

There was one instance where a black general was put over the defense department and Joe Biden says 'why?' 'He is an African American and I manifested one of the key words, diversity, so see what I did?' 'Yes, but he's male and not female and he's not transgender.' So intersectionality becomes the scorecard to determine how well you are applying Critical theory through the lens of Critical race theory.

Then another subset is Critical law theory and here comes this defund the police. The whole principal of lex rex where the law is king is nothing more than a power grab from a particular race and therefore it needs to be undermined – both the law itself, the judiciary and the law enforcement. All of that needs to be replaced just like leadership is replaced with community organizers, law enforcement needs to be replaced with community counselors. So Critical theory gives birth to Critical race theory whereby it's your race that determines the fact that you are and will ever be an oppressor, then Critical law theory to intersectionality and all of these things begin to have the buzz words attached to them. We used to strive for Biblical justice and now it's social justice. We used to talk about equality (not concerning dignity and respect) and now it's equity, that is the distribution of outcome it to be controlled. Diversity is based on intersectionality – sensitivity to training which means if you are of one race such as the white race, you're training is not to contribute but to sit and listen.

Then there is the insistence on the Darwinian view of races. In my humble opinion you can never attack ethnic discrimination until you get to the Biblical cosmology that there is one race, which is called the human race, where Adam had all of that DNA that would come out in

microevolution in the colors of skin in the future but what Paul said in Acts 17 is key here. Acts 17:26–27 says [26] *And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,* [27] *that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him.* There are multiple ethnicities but there is one race and everyone is made in the image of God and is to be treated in that manner. In Christianity, there is neither Jew nor Gentile in terms of status for we are one in Christ covered with the blood of Christ.

Then comes the cancel culture and then historical revision. To destroy a nation, you have to destroy its history. Instead of recognizing every historical figure with their positives and negatives, there are certain negatives that are unforgivable sins and therefore they think the record of these people need to be wiped out.

Finally, with Critical theory and all its subsets, is directly anti-Christian. There was a letter sent to religious leaders telling us to realize there are some meat on the bones of this theory and its subsets so get the meat off the bone and spit the bones out and chew the meat of it. My retort on that publicly was that this was a wrong metaphor, a wrong analogy. The fact is, that Critical theory is not something with meat on the bone, it is nothing but bone. All the meat you need is in the sufficiency of God's Word and the promises in God's Word that are found in a Biblical world and life view and the power of the Gospel. Critical theory is not a boney fish you can get some meat off if you are hungry. Critical theory would be more like the ocean – where you are thirsty person in a lifeboat with all that water around you, thinking if you drink ocean water you will live, but then realize that this is salt water and it will kill you. There is no way to drink ocean water and spit out the salt so don't delude yourself on this. The poison is in the stew, if I can mix the metaphor so to speak.

Critical theory is anti-Christian, anti-Gospel, anti-Biblical world and life view, just go read their statements. One of the oppressors is the natural family, the work ethic – all of those creation mandates are attacked. The reason these are attacked is because the foundation of a Biblical world and life view rests in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis. In the opening chapters of Genesis we see the binary – God and His creation. To point out that everyday there is a binary – a Creator God – His creation contains His fingerprints of the binary. Examples would be light/darkness, evil/good, male/female, land/sea, but the form and function displayed in Genesis is attacked by a pagan world and life view.

My dear friend, Peter Jones has written exquisitely on this, and that is exactly what paganism moves toward. Androgyny – that there is no difference between us. In fact, we have even gone to work to remove the biological differences through transgender surgery which is a fabricated notion that we will reassign your gender. I you dig someone up a hundred years later they will still have the DNA they were born with. You can't reassign gender for we are the biological sex that God made us. Certainly, we can discuss what lifestyles come out of that sex appropriately from God's Word, but the fact is, we are what God made us. You can do all the cultural work you want to but that woman is going to tell her husband 'we just had a baby boy' and that man has any sense at all he will say 'oh no we didn't, you did, thank you.' The binary is one of the blessings we have, but same sex marriages, androgyny, surgical mutilation, chemical manipulation won't change the DNA.

There is a certain disease that blocks the messages from the brain to the reproductive private parts to the man and hormonal treatment is actually the infliction of that disease that we used to try and cure. Now we give it to 13 and 14 year old boys and call it medical practice. I believe it's malpractice and child abuse. It has found its movement into society because the

church has a problem. We think it's our mission to redeem the culture, not save sinners and then disciple them, which does change the culture when sinners get transformed by the grace of God. Critical theory declares there is no reconciliation, no repentance, and confession is not allowed, only lifelong penance. There is no forgiveness for it is simply the oppressed becoming the new oppressors, until the new oppressed revolt against them, but they can handle that for you with an authoritarian state that will enforce it with military and IRS power. There is no meat on the bone in Critical theory and its subsets.

How is Critical theory then getting such a foothold in society? Number one, the evangelical church is scared to death because no one wants to be called homophobic, racists or bigot but that's exactly what will happen. Although for a minute I want to get us (the evangelic church) off the hook. We know that racism and ethnic discrimination is an issue and we hate it. We here the Gospel solution in the book of James on this. We also want people who are desperately struggling sexually and destroyed by sexual promiscuity and perversion, to know forgiveness, repentance, transforming power of regeneration, the blessings of justification so when these things come up the church gives an ear to it and what is being said. Satan loves to use that moment if we're not alert.

The text at the beginning of this study from I Timothy 1 was a letter Paul wrote to Timothy after he had been liberated from his first Roman imprisonment. Do you remember what Paul said to the church at Ephesus before this imprisonment? Paul says to them in Acts 20:29–30, *[29] I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; [30] and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.* That's exactly what happened so when he was released from Roman imprisonment and received the report about the false teachers coming into the church at Ephesus, Paul sent his best man on a ministry of church revitalization. Then told Timothy the very first thing he wanted him to tackle was the false teachers for they are teaching strange doctrines. The elders had allowed them in and Paul had warned them but still allowed them. Then Paul gives Timothy in I Timothy 3 the qualifications for leadership. Paul tells him the false leaders and teachers need to be removed.

Here is the takeaway. Progressive Christianity – its false leadership that uses our terms but not our dictionary – has its finger on valid issues but the finger is only causing a greater problem and is distracting us from the Gospel answers that Christ alone provides when He gives a new record and a new heart. Therefore, we have to say 'no' to the new motivation, new mission and the new message of Progressive Christianity. For it has opened the door for these abhorrent, adulterated and eventually apostate doctrines of first order. They are going after the sufficiency of Scripture and the first order issues of the Gospel and they can't deliver for they are not designed to deliver. They are designed to polarize, to create conflict and to create revolution in the street, if necessary, in order that we look for another savior known as the authoritarian government. The evangelical church is buying into it because it is buying into the motivation of 'we need to be culturally relevant.' It is buying into the new mission which is cultural transformation therefore its message is cultural accommodation. Now Critical theory, Side B and all the other things find root and rest.

Here is another reason it is tough. There are powerful culture shapers out there and they have all bought into it. There are five of them with the academy being one of them. The college your father went to is not the college that is there anymore. The curriculum had been penetrated. I'm not saying our kids don't need to go to school, I'm just saying know where they are going and who is teaching them. The curriculum is not your ally. I praise the Lord whenever we have

a Campus Outreach ministry that is standing firm on a college campus and we can get students into a good church while they are at that college, but realize the academy is shaping their mind and it's been doing it since the 1960s. It's not just the colleges but it goes all the way down to the high schools and into the elementary schools.

Critical theory is embraced and employed and used. Journalism has completely embraced it. The media uses it – the culture shaper of the academy of journalism and the media. Thirdly, the entertainment world is constantly putting out unbelievably well made films, plays, music and they know the avenue is literature and the arts. It was even used before the 1960s. There is the bureaucratic state in the local, state and federal government and they are funding Critical theory as diversity and sensitivity training, and make you go through it. Then corporate America has completely embraced it so to work there you have to go through the training programs that are completely put together by Critical theory and the LGBTQ agenda. Those are the power culture shapers right now.

We desperately need the people of God who have conviction, courage, compassion and who within the church of Jesus Christ who are in the world who will not withdraw in the world. We contextualize – we speak to the culture in the terms it understands but we do not speak on the terms in demands. With courage and conviction, we hold to a Biblical dictionary and Biblical terms to the Gospel of saving grace and then ask God through discipleship to build strong men and women that go into every sphere of society with that seamless commitment to the preeminence of Christ, with the whole counsel of God, motivated by the Gospel of grace in Jesus Christ, showing the world what the Gospel does. What does the world bring? It brings a path of misery with no hope because it is not designed to bring hope, for it's designed for despair so that you give up hope, but we declare the blessings of the Blessed Hope that is found in Christ. We plead, we pray, we persuade and declare with clarity and charity as we go to seek the lost. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I thank You for the great privilege to serve You with these elders, deacons, pastors and members at Briarwood. Help us to say 'no' to any vestige of self-righteousness, any sense of boastful arrogance, for we are simply but profoundly sinners saved by grace but we also know profoundly that grace is greater than our sin. We can be forgiven. We can be changed. We can grow and when we go to be with You there will be no presence of sin nor its consequences but until then, help us Lord, to be motivated out of love to Christ, not to be accepted by the culture. Give us the mission of making disciples of all the nations, the message of the Gospel framed teaching of the whole counsel of God, and the ministries of worship, evangelism, disciple making, and enfolding one another that the world may see a people who are not a people but have become by grace the people of God to the glory of God, in Jesus' Name, Amen.