CRITICAL RACE THEORY

A Biblical and Historical Perspective

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A new ideology has been thrust into the forefront of American culture in recent weeks. Terms like systemic racism, white fragility, or intersectionality, are popping up on Facebook posts, newscasts, Tweets, best-selling books, and interviews with “experts” on racial relations. Many Americans have never heard these terms, but they are not new to any college student, employee of a major corporation, or member of a governmental agency. Critical Race Theory has been embedded in diversity/inclusivity training for many years.

To those who haven’t been immersed in the language of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the discourse can be very confusing. They don’t understand why it’s now wrong to be “color-blind,” why they are being labeled as racists when they feel they’ve never had any prejudicial thoughts and never did any harm to a person of color, or why “all lives matter” is considered to be a racist phrase. The language barrier between the thinking of those who are “woke” and the thinking of those who oppose or have never learned the terminology of CRT is leading to hostility and misunderstanding on a massive scale.

Not only that, each side is accusing the other side of lacking in knowledge. The critical race theorists say that Americans are ignoring, not only past, but present evidences of racial injustice, while those who oppose the movement don’t deny that racism exists, but, they say, the CRT movement is dangerous, and since it has its ideological roots in philosophies that are contrary to the Gospel, it will produce the fruit of those philosophies: revolution, division, and bitterness. I take the latter position and I hope that this paper will explain why.

When I first began writing about CRT, it was in response to the June 2019 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) vote on Resolution 9 to approve of Critical Race Theory as “a set of analytical tools” to “address the social dynamics” associated with race. At the time, I thought this vote merely threatened to divide the SBC—the largest evangelical denomination in America—but since the tragic death of George Floyd, I don’t think it’s an overstatement to say that Critical Race Theory also threatens to divide our nation.

Unfortunately, some of my friends and family (Christians and non-Christians) have embraced CRT, and somehow, they think that since I reject the ideology, I am denying that racism exists. I want to make it very clear that this is not the case. I do not deny the evil that African Americans have experienced (or presently experience) in America.
Slavery, Jim Crow, and racial injustices have happened—and parts of the church certainly were complicit in these sins. However, there were two churches during the slave era: one that misused the Bible (creating a “putrid exegesis,” as Al Mohler, the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary described it), and gave precedence to science over the teachings of the scriptures. . . and another church that fought for the abolition of slavery, hid fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad, gave their money to redeem slaves, and shed the blood of hundreds of thousands of their young sons in what they thought was the righteous cause of emancipation.

The Southern Baptist Convention itself was founded because the Home Mission Society of the Baptist General Convention (BGC) refused to appoint slaveholders to the mission field, causing the denomination to divide. We often talk about the failures of the SBC, but what about the righteous stance of the Home Mission Society of the BGC, or the brave sacrifice of the Christians who opposed slavery? Forgetting, neglecting, or downplaying, their heroic stand allows the narrative of “Christian” complicity to continue.

While SBC proponents of Resolution 9 claim that they’re merely using CRT as “a set of analytical tools that explain how race has and continues to function in society, and intersectionality is the study of how different personal characteristics overlap and inform one’s experience,” those who oppose Resolution 9 assert that Critical Race Theory and intersectionality are “godless ideologies that are indebted to radical feminism and postmodernism, and neo-Marxism . . .” and that they “emerged from a secular worldview and are rooted in ideologies that are incompatible with Christianity.” Which view is true? Which view is biblical?

In order to understand what the debate is about, this booklet will attempt to define Critical Race Theory, explain its philosophical and historical roots, and determine if it can be employed by Christians as a biblical way to view racial relations.

**What is Critical Race Theory?**

Critical Race Theory is a branch off the larger tree of Critical Theory, which also includes feminist theory, gender theory, queer theory, Latino/a theory, and many other “theories” having to do with different group identities. Many universities require students to take at least one class on some aspect of Critical Theory before they graduate. There are even complete degrees offered in topics such as women’s studies, gender studies, or postcolonial studies. Since Critical Theory has become so entrenched in the educational process, those who were taught its principles have carried them out into their own area of expertise, merging them into disciplines such as sociology, psychology, law, education, human resources, and even religion.
In politics, Critical Theory manifests as identity politics or political correctness. Its followers are often called social justice warriors. It is now the prevailing ideology of what is known as the liberal left, and critical social justice, with its emphasis on race, sex, and gender, and its censorship of “hate speech,” gave rise to “cancel culture” (where the failure to support aspects of Critical Theory leads to the loss of employment or other types of persecution), and is pervasive in all areas of social media, entertainment, news coverage, and education. Resolution 9 revealed that it has even made inroads into evangelical Christianity.

CRT is a relatively new movement whose main purpose is to attempt to explain how racism still exists in America even though, legally, many advances were made in the 1950s and 60s to guarantee equal rights for persons of all skin colors. Richard Delgado, who helped to organize its first meeting in Madison, WI in 1989, and is one of the founders of CRT, described its origin:

> Critical race theory sprang up in the mid-1970s, as a number of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars across the country realized, more or less simultaneously, that the heady advances of the civil rights era of the 1960s had stalled and, in many respects, were being rolled back. Realizing that new forms of racism were gaining ground, early writers such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado . . . put their minds to the task.

The original creators, Bell, Freeman, and Delgado were all law professors, so it isn’t surprising that CRT was built on the foundation of critical legal studies. (This is the attempt to understand the ways in which the legal system is unjust to blacks, not based on the creation of unjust laws, but based on the belief that all laws are subject to the interpretation of those who enforce them.) They also relied on feminist insights which describe “the relationship between power and the construction of social roles” and very importantly, the “unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination.”

It is this claim of invisibility that detractors from CRT dispute. They worry that critical race theorists can make the assertion that Americans are racist without having to show any definitive proof. Therefore, if CRT is just a fact of life which invisibly exists in the systems and structures of society—regardless of legislative or individual actions—white guilt and black victimhood will be perpetual, with no process for repentance, healing, or change. This would also help explain how Matthew Hall, provost for the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in an interview about racial reconciliation, made this statement about his struggle with racism:

> I am a racist. If that freaks you out, if you think the worst thing somebody can call you is a racist, then you’re not thinking biblically. Because guess what, I’m going to struggle with racism and white supremacy until the day I die and get my glorified body and a
completely renewed and sanctified mind, because I’m immersed in a culture where I benefit from racism all the time.¹⁰

I’m sure Hall doesn’t believe that blacks should be incarcerated at a higher rate than whites, have less access to home ownership, or less educational or employment opportunities, and I doubt that he has any animosity towards people of color, so why does he believe he’s a racist? It seems that Hall has accepted many of the “insights” of CRT.¹¹

**Defining Critical Race Theory**

Trying to give an official definition of CRT is difficult, and many who have tried to describe it are often accused of not understanding it. (In part, this has to do with the postmodern distrust of language, as we will explore further on in this booklet.) Nevertheless, I will attempt to explain some of the main terms (which I’ve highlighted in bold font) as used by the movement.

The primary claim of CRT is that **racism is systemic**. Jemar Tisby, an evangelical who defends CRT, explains in his book *The Color of Compromise*:

> What do we mean when we talk about *racism*? Beverly Daniel Tatum provides a shorthand definition: racism is a system of oppression based on race.¹² Notice Tatum’s emphasis on systemic oppression. Racism can operate through impersonal systems and not simply through the malicious words and actions of individuals. Another definition explains racism as *prejudice plus power*…¹³

**White supremacy** is no longer defined as “the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities, especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another,”¹⁴ instead, it simply means being a member of the white majority.

This is because in CRT, relationships are described in terms of **power**, as **oppressor vs. oppressed**. This can manifest as white vs. black, men vs. women, Christianity vs. the LGBTQ community, Christianity vs. Islam, etc. Again, it doesn’t matter if any actual abuse occurs in the relationship; what matters is the power dynamic between the *groups*. For example, Christianity is the prevailing religion in America, therefore it has a *hegemonic* (dominant) position over other religions or beliefs, putting it in an oppressor *position* to Islam, for example. Whites are more populous, wealthier, and hold more positions of influence than blacks, so they are in the *position* of being an oppressor to blacks. Another name for the dominant power structure is **whiteness**. This beneficial position in society is called **white privilege**.

The defensiveness that whites experience when they are called racists is called **white fragility** by sociologist and diversity trainer Robin Diangelo. She says:
As long as you define a racist as an individual who intentionally is mean, based on race, you’re going to feel defensive . . . [But] when we understand racism as a system that we have been raised in and that its impact is inevitable, it’s really not a question of good or bad. It’s just, ‘I have it. I have been socialized into it.’

(Matthew Hall is a perfect example of someone who doesn’t want to be accused of white fragility.)

Peggy McIntosh, a feminist scholar and anti-racism activist, in her essay, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” lists fifty conditions of daily life that she takes for granted simply because she’s white. Since systemic racism, she says, is often invisible to white people, she wrote the piece to explain how she (and most members of the dominant race or culture) doesn’t realize many of the things people of color have to struggle with that white people don’t even think about. These include things like being able to live in a location where my neighbors “will be neutral or pleasant to me,” or being able to go shopping alone without the fear that I will “be followed or harassed.”

Many times, say critical race theorists, whites are so oblivious to their privilege, that they don’t even realize they may have done or said something to offend or hurt a minority person. These unintentional offenses are called microaggressions. For example, Roberto Montenegro, a psychiatrist at Seattle Children’s Hospital, says he “remembers vividly one particular ‘dehumanizing’ moment” as he “was leaving an upscale restaurant with his wife, standing in line at the valet curb, when a white woman handed him her keys, mistaking him for an attendant.” Montenegro realizes that “such slights can be unintentional but said they not only take the wind out of someone’s sails; they are frustrating and hurtful.”

Derald Wing Sue, a professor at Columbia University, wrote an essay that discusses whether a white person actually “engage[s] in microaggressions,” or if people of color “simply misinterpret the action.” He concludes by admitting that there are no specific instruments available for measuring or assessing whether acts of microaggression are intentional or unintentional, but assures the reader that “microaggressions are potentially present whenever human interactions involve participants who differ in race and culture.”

This has caused some detractors of CRT to be suspicious of those who promote the idea of racist microaggressions. Since CRT claims that all whites have unconscious bias and are automatically racists, wouldn’t that lead to the assumption by a person of color that a particular action was intentional? And doesn’t the search for microaggressions actually create the dynamic of suspicion and hostility that antiracists are trying to purge from society? So, instead of
encouraging an atmosphere of charity and respect, CRT *encourages* the paranoid belief that racism is everywhere and is getting worse in society rather than better.

Along with this suspicious search for microaggressions is the concern that outright racist language has now shifted to the use of **code words** such as “low income,” “criminal,” “urban,” “thugs,” “renters,” or “inner city.” These words appear to be neutral, but critical race theorists say they are actually covert ways of derogatorily referring to blacks.21

Using the phrase “All Lives Matter” rather than the phrase **Black Lives Matter** is another way of revealing your white privilege, critical theorists say, because as a white person you have no ability to understand how hard it is to survive in a racist society where black lives are less important than white lives. Here is one explanation of why it’s wrong to say “All Lives Matter:”

If a patient being rushed to the ER after an accident were to point to their mangled leg and say, “This is what matters right now,” and the doctor saw the scrapes and bruises of other areas and countered, “but all of you matters,” wouldn’t there be a question as to why he doesn’t show urgency in aiding that what is most at risk? At a community fundraiser for a decaying local library, you would never see a mob of people from the next city over show up angry and offended yelling, “All libraries matter!”—especially when theirs is already well-funded.22

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is not only a rallying cry, but it is also an organization that has been at the forefront of the protests and riots after the death of George Floyd. Many people, such as J.D. Greear, the president of the SBC, have made it clear that they believe “black lives matter” (as a declaration), but they don’t support the Black Lives Matter organization or movement because its precepts are in opposition to Christian precepts.23 Started as a hashtag on Twitter in response to Trayvon Martin’s death, BLM has expanded to include concern for others on the spectrum of Critical Theory. These are some of their beliefs which clash with biblical teachings:

- We are self-reflexive and do the work required to dismantle cisgender privilege and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence...
- We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and “villages” that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable.
- We foster a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking, or
rather, the belief that all in the world are heterosexual (unless s/he or they disclose otherwise). 24

As you can see, Black Lives Matter aligns with Critical Theory in that it seeks to address the victimization, not only of people of color, but those of many different identity groups. A person’s identity may also be formed by an overlap (or intersection) of membership in two or more groups.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a law professor and leading scholar of CRT, coined the term intersectionality after she read the case about a group of five black women who were laid off from a General Motors plant in the 1970s because they didn’t have seniority. They didn’t have seniority because “the company simply did not hire black women before 1964.” 25 The company hired white women (as secretaries) and black men (as janitors) before 1964, therefore, the court dismissed their case because the judge was concerned that black women would become a special class, explaining that a “lawsuit must be examined to see if it states a cause of action for race discrimination, sex discrimination, or alternatively either, but not a combination of both.” 26 Crenshaw explained that because of the intersection of their identities they fell through the cracks of the justice system.

A person’s identity may even include intersections between being both an oppressor and an oppressed person. (For example, I may be privileged because I’m white, but I might also have unique struggles because I’m a woman.) Critical race theorists hope that intersectionality will reveal that since “we are all caught in multiple systems, we can learn to see our connection to others,” 27 but critics of CRT say that intersectionality has caused a competitive victimhood over who is the most oppressed.

The theory of differential racialization claims that different groups suffer discrimination at different times. For example, Japanese-Americans were “in intense disfavor and removed to war relocation camps” 28 during World War II, and Chinese-Americans have been under fire recently because of the Covid-19 pandemic. 29 Therefore, racism is perpetual and will never go away. Even if blacks were to reach a level of equity in society (to a critical race theorist this word doesn’t mean equality of opportunity, it means equality in outcome) 30 there will always be another target group and racism will always exist.

Mike Wallace of 60 Minutes once interviewed the American actor, Morgan Freeman, and asked him how he would get rid of racism. Freeman replied, “Stop talking about it. I’m going to stop calling you a white man, and I’m going to ask you to stop calling me a black man. I know you as Mike Wallace. You know me as Morgan Freeman.” 31 Freeman’s solution to racism was for all people to become “color-blind,” but critical race theorists say this is an inadequate remedy
because whites are often unable to see oppression in society, so laws that make racism illegal (in hiring practices, redlining mortgages, and so on) are not enough. Solutions must also recognize the inequity that has happened to blacks because of their history of being victimized by slavery and segregation for hundreds of years.

Since racism and inequity are structured into society, it is also unfair to expect that people of color will succeed through meritocracy, that is, the commonsense belief that they are simply able to work hard and “pull themselves up by the bootstraps.” Some critical race theorists promote the concept of reparations to help blacks overcome this disparity.\(^\text{32}\)

**Storytelling** serves a particularly important function in CRT. Since each identity group has “different histories and experiences with oppression,”\(^\text{33}\) this gives “black, Indian, Asian, or Latino/a writers and thinkers”\(^\text{34}\) a unique voice that may be able to “communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know.”\(^\text{35}\) Because they are minorities, they alone are uniquely capable of speaking about their experience of oppression. This has led some CRT proponents to tell white people they have no right to dispute any claims about the lived experience of any minorities, and that, instead, oppressors should just shut up and listen (an actual term in CRT)\(^\text{36}\) to the stories of marginalized peoples.

**De-centering** is connected to this idea of unique voice. In CRT, it’s referring to a way of focusing on the “other” in society. It’s necessary to shift the center, say critical theorists, because “without doing so, many groups simply remain invisible. When they are seen, they are typically judged through the experiences of White people, rather than understood on their own terms…”\(^\text{37}\) Instead, a new form of history from the margins needs to be constructed—from the perspective of those who haven’t normally recorded their history—the poor and the voiceless.

Critical race theorists are also concerned that minority history has been colonized, meaning that it isn’t included in the normal flow of curriculum. Instead, it’s set aside as a special chapter in a textbook or given a special month in the year (such as January being set aside as Black History Month) and is often told from the perspective of those in power.

One of the greatest concerns over CRT is that it denies the importance of being able to reason in a dialogue or debate. Traditional ways of establishing truth—through empirical evidence, rational argument, or even the scriptures, are considered to be forms of investigation that come from “white, male-centered forms of thinking that have characterized much of Western thought.”\(^\text{38}\) They also argue that “objective truth, like merit, does not exist, at least in social science and politics. In these realms, truth is a social construct created to suit the purposes of the dominant group.”\(^\text{39}\)
Since members of any hegemonic group (especially white males) can never understand the experience of a member of a minority group, critical race theorists say persons of a dominant race are never permitted to dispute the views of a person in a minority group who is sharing their lived experience of oppression. Determining truth through individual perspective is called **standpoint epistemology**. This is why the phrase “that’s your truth” is popular in our culture.

A consequence of this form of determining truth is that it rejects all **meta-narratives**. These are large stories that transcend time and help us to make sense of life. An example of a meta-narrative would be the Marxist view that history is merely the record of the clash between those who control the means of production (the bourgeoisie) and those who do the labor (the proletariat). Economic Marxists look at the world through this lens and it helps them to fit current events (like a puzzle piece) into the larger puzzle. Of course, another meta-narrative is found in Christianity. We believe that there is a God who sent his son to die on a cross for our sins. We see world events and personal experiences through the lens of scripture, but critical race theorists say the only truth that can actually be known is what an individual may experience, so these other ways to make sense of history, the world, or our lives are discarded.

If I want to help minorities in their struggle for justice, instead of practicing **white silence**, I can become an **ally**. But this can easily become **problematic** because I may be suspected of doing **antiracist work** merely to look good to others or to **virtue signal**. Finally, to be **woke**, I must subscribe to the beliefs of CRT.

**The Philosophical Roots of Critical Race Theory**

One of the major philosophical elements of Critical Race Theory is **postmodernism**. In order to have a greater appreciation of why critical theorists have embraced this newer philosophy, it might help to understand the **modernism** that they believe needs to end. In the medieval era, the source of knowledge and truth went through a process of change. Hopefully, this short history will help make sense of the transition.

In the 13th century, the theologian Thomas Aquinas blended Aristotle’s “natural” philosophy with Christian doctrine in his epic work *Summa Theologica*. Consequently, the Catholic Church adopted many Aristotelian “scientific” views, such as the belief that there were only four elements (earth, water, air, and fire), that the earth was at the center of the solar system (the geocentric view), and that it was possible for something to spontaneously generate out of nothing. Over time, these views became a part of church dogma. (This is why when Galileo questioned the geocentric view, he was called before the Inquisition.)
After the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church was no longer able to control what people thought and the Catholic/Aristotelian worldview was challenged (especially by Francis Bacon, the founder of the scientific method, who wrote his *Novum Organum*, outlining the new scientific method, as a direct response to Aristotle’s *Organum*). The focus on empirical evidence, in conjunction with the truth of the scriptures and a search for the “mind of God” in His creation, initiated a great Scientific Revolution.

Not long after this burst of scientific curiosity, a group of thinkers became excited that people were free from the “dark ages” of religious control. Impressed by the advances made in science, they developed what they called an “enlightened” philosophy which often gave precedence to empirical evidence and human reason over scriptural revelation. This was the beginning of the modern era.

I’d like to take a little side eddy here to note that one of the first consequences of the Enlightenment emphasis of science and reason over scriptural revelation was the advent of scientific racism. For example, Thomas Jefferson (the same person who wrote in the *Declaration of Independence* that “all men are created equal”) described blacks in “scientific” language in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*:

> Besides those of colour, figure, and hair, there are other distinctions proving a difference. They secrete less by the kidneys, and more by the glands of the skin, which gives them a very strong and disagreeable odour. This greater degree of transpiration renders them more tolerant of heat, and less so of cold, than the whites.40

David Hume, another Enlightenment philosopher who relied on science, empirical evidence, and reason (and rejected faith and biblical revelation as a source of knowledge) had this to say about people of color:

> I am apt to suspect the Negroes, and in general all other species of men to be naturally inferior to Whites. There never was any civilized nation of any other complexion [sic] than white, nor even any individual eminent in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures among them, no arts, no sciences . . .41

The Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant agreed with Hume, saying, “The Negroes of Africa have received from nature no intelligence that rises above the foolish. Hume invites anyone to quote a single example of a Negro who has exhibited talents.”42 Voltaire, who also emphasized reason and science over biblical truth, had this to say about blacks:
Their round eyes, their flat nose, their lips which are always thick, their differently shaped ears, the wool on their head, the measure even of their intelligence establishes between them and other species of men prodigious differences. Polygenism was a form of scientific racism that claimed different races had parents other than Adam and Eve. To the polygenist, the Africans were a sub-species of humanity, a different and separate species than the whites. This was not an obscure view; it was the cutting-edge science of the day. For example, Samuel George Morton, a Harvard professor and president of the American Academy of Natural Sciences, was a phrenologist who collected skulls from around the world to prove his scientific racial views.

On the other hand, the abolitionists stood firm on the scriptures, especially Acts 17:26 which declared that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth.” They believed in the brotherhood of man because we all had one father (Adam), therefore, we were all equal.

There seems to be a forgotten history of the Christian battle against polygenism. For example, in London, England, Christians organized the Ethnological Society to battle against slavery and the abuse of indigenous peoples. Their motto was ab uno sanguine (from one blood). Their members would become part of the Clapham Sect, founded by John Newton, the former slave trader and writer of the hymn “Amazing Grace.” William Wilberforce, the British parliamentarian whose perseverance is credited with finally leading to the abolition of slavery in the entire British Empire, was also a member of the Clapham Sect.

Frederick Douglass, the escaped slave turned abolitionist, also battled against scientific racism in his 1854 speech given at Western Reserve College entitled, “The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered.” Abolitionists such as John Rankin, whose home was a major stop on the Underground Railroad, would oppose scientific racism and argue for the brotherhood of all men:

It must be admitted that the Africans and the rest of mankind have all sprung from one common father [emphasis mine]; and consequently all, originally were alike free. The right to freedom belongs to the Africans.

These biblical views were often ignored by Southern slaveholders such as John A. Broadus, a professor of New Testament interpretation and president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who said, “The Negroes in the United States come from several quite distinct races, at least three of which, even at the present day, present broadly marked differences.” He used the language of the Enlightenment philosophers to describe blacks:
The typical negro, with thick lips, flat nose, protruding jaws, narrow and retreating forehead, is entirely distinct from the other two races, and vastly inferior in point of intelligence. For my part, I never saw one of these who could be regarded as very intelligent.\footnote{In the last half of the 19th century, polygenism would be replaced with social Darwinism as the source of white supremacist belief. So now instead of racism being based on the belief that blacks were a sub-species of humanity, the darker races were inferior because they were less evolved. This was the view held by Charles S. Gardner, professor of sociology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who thought the only way blacks would advance was through mixing the blood of whites and blacks in a belief this would cause the black race to evolve.}

In the last half of the 19th century, polygenism would be replaced with social Darwinism as the source of white supremacist belief. So now instead of racism being based on the belief that blacks were a sub-species of humanity, the darker races were inferior because they were less evolved. This was the view held by Charles S. Gardner, professor of sociology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who thought the only way blacks would advance was through mixing the blood of whites and blacks in a belief this would cause the black race to evolve.

It is the simple truth to say that the negro race has never risen appreciably except by mixture with a superior race. Whether this mulatto product of race fusion can become a stable, permanent race is an open question; by a process of natural selection, there will ultimately appear a definite and relatively fixed race-type of mulattoes.\footnote{Of course, this “scientific” view also led to the belief that “race fusion” could cause the devolution of the white race. This is one reason why intermarriage was frowned upon.}

Of course, this “scientific” view also led to the belief that “race fusion” could cause the devolution of the white race. This is one reason why intermarriage was frowned upon.

I hope this contrast between the views of scientists and philosophers, and those of faithful Bible-believers, reveals that if Christians had remained faithful to the scriptures ALONE, perhaps America would have avoided the travesty of white supremacy, slavery, Jim Crow, and all the horrors and injustices associated with racism. True social justice has always been achieved by those who love the scriptures. Moving forward to our time, I am greatly concerned that we are making the same mistake when we add Critical Race Theory to our Christian faith.

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Back to the philosophical history . . .

One of the main goals of the Enlightenment philosophers was to create a just society. Two revolutions, one in America and one in France, occurred as a result of their thought. American founders, influenced by the Great Awakening, aligned their thought with Christian doctrines, such as the concept that people are inherently sinful. This led to the inclusion of “checks and balances” into American political theory, while in France the philosophes embraced the views of Diderot and Rousseau—that humans are inherently good. The French philosophers tried to erase all Christian principles from society, even making a week last ten days (instead of the biblical seven days). Ironically, the resulting Reign of Terror revealed that “good” people would quickly resort to mob rule and guillotines.
Georg W. F. Hegel, a German philosopher, initially thought of the French Revolution as “a glorious mental dawn,” but when it failed he rejected the godless view of the European Enlightenment and decided to design his own version of an “ideal state” which wouldn’t remove the spiritual perspective. While his philosophy is much more detailed than what I can describe here, there is one idea—the dialectic—that has had a great influence on liberal/leftist ideologies.

Hegel created a philosophy of history in which he asserted that there was an Absolute Spirit (or Geist) that was moving the world forward and upward to greater and greater manifestations of freedom. To prove his philosophy, he started with the Persian empire and traced the expansion of freedom over time showing “that in past Oriental civilizations [the Persians] one was free; in classical antiquity, Greece and Rome, some were free; and in modern Germanic and Anglo-Saxon civilization, all are free.”

This theory worked well until he came to the failure of the French Revolution. He created the dialectic as a solution. History was in constant conflict, Hegel said, therefore, since the world is moving forward through a continuous clash of ideas, an opinion (the thesis) will be contradicted by another opinion (the antithesis) and this battle will result in, not the triumph of either the thesis or its antithesis, but a new synthesis.

The synthesis would then become the thesis and the process would repeat itself over and over like a great spiral that constantly moves the world forward and upward to greater heights of freedom. This is called the spiral view of history. Therefore, the French Revolution may have seemed like a setback to the progression of freedom, but it actually led to the development of nation states, individual rights, private property, etc., so it was still propelling history forward and upward.

Hegel had an evolutionary or progressive view of history. He believed that the world was going to get better and better over time. This is the opposite of the Christian view that “evil men will wax worse and worse” (2 Tim. 3: 13) and the world will continue to deteriorate until Christ comes and sets up his kingdom.

Unfortunately, some of Hegel’s students became theologians and were active in a movement known as the historical-critical movement. One of its goals was to critique the scriptures in light of scientific advances or archaeological discoveries, so if parts of the Bible didn’t align with the latest breakthrough (such as Darwinian evolution), they were discredited. This was the beginning of the modernist (or liberalist) movement in Christianity. To those who adopted the views of the historical critics, Christianity was no longer a religion of truth, so it had to be reinterpreted to become a religion of experience whose ethical teachings could help propel human society forward and upward to new realms of progress and prosperity.
Because Hegelian progressivism was added to Christianity, the church divided. Those “fundamentalists” who held to the inerrancy and purity of scripture (regardless of what the science and/or archaeology of the day seemed to prove) maintained their biblical faith, while those mainstream churches who accepted the claims of the historical critics felt they had to create a new, modern form of Christianity, called the social gospel, which trusted in the latest scientific views and attempted to use socialist economics to bring about a just society.

Karl Marx, the founder of communism, was influenced to reject Christianity by another student of Hegel, Ludwig Feuerbach, who wrote a book entitled The Essence of Christianity, which argued that God was merely created out of the minds of men. Marx then rejected Hegel’s Geist as the spirit behind the progression of history. Instead, his “ideal state” would be godless.

After Hegel died, the followers of his philosophy would split into two camps. Marx was in the Left Hegelian (or Young Hegelian) camp, while the Right Hegelians maintained the traditional view of Geist and would remain prominent in Germany during the decades before the Nazis came to power.

A group of Left Hegelian Marxists (many of whom were Jewish) known simply as the Frankfurt School, had to flee Nazi Germany. After World War II, when the failures of both Nazism and Marxist communism were clearly revealed to the world, most people might have given up on their affection for Hegel and Marx, but the members of the Frankfurt School didn’t admit defeat. Instead, they developed what they called Critical Theory. Although they could see that capitalism hadn’t failed (as Marx had predicted it would), there were other problems in society, so instead of promoting revolution based only upon economic divisions, they shifted to a new form of Marxism based on the clash of identities. This is why it’s often called Neo (new)-Marxism.

Herbert Marcuse (who did his thesis on Hegel) was one of the members of the Frankfurt School. He thought the new Marxist cause should become that of the “substratum,” those who resided underneath the conservative middle class and was made up of “the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and colors, the unemployed and the unemployable.” Marcuse admitted he didn’t have any ideas about how to construct a better society, but he thought oppressed persons could find their satisfaction merely in the act of opposing injustice. He called this opposition the “Great Refusal.” It has been represented in many movements by the image of the raised fist.

During the 1960’s and early 70’s, the ideas of Marcuse influenced the New Left and he became the “guru of the student movement.” In his book Eros and Civilization he also pushed for “personal and sexual liberation.” (He coined the term “Make love, not war!”) Realizing that
revolutionary support would not come from the American working class, he instead appealed to “students, ethnic minorities, women, and workers in the Third World.” These movements became known as the anti-war movement, the black power movement (as opposed to the Civil Rights movement headed by Martin Luther King, Jr., which had its roots in the church), the feminist movement, and liberation theology.

Marcuse also thought Sigmund Freud’s idea of the subconscious could be “married” to Marx. He said, “according to Freud, repression is bound to increase with the progress of civilization, at the same time and parallel to it aggressiveness is going to be mobilized and is going to be released.” In other words, the more civilized society was, the more repressed its citizens would become, and the more they would be ripe for revolution.

Antonio Gramsci, who was imprisoned by the fascist dictator Mussolini because he was a leader of the Italian communist party, was disappointed that the lower classes (the subaltern), who were greater in number, never revolted against the less numerous ruling class. In his Prison Notebooks he explained that cultural hegemony—the atmosphere created by the ruling class or majority in society and spread by the media, churches, schools, advertising, and entertainment—allowed those with power and influence to exploit the lower classes, causing them to willfully participate in their own consensual oppression. He said that most people just accept the status quo even if it isn’t beneficial to them. It’s just the way things are, the commonsense notions of society.

After learning of the horrors of the Holocaust and the Stalinist purges, the postmodernists (a group of mostly French or “Continental” philosophers) argued that the Enlightenment project, which was based on human reason and empirical evidence had failed. Jacques Derrida (who studied Hegel) developed a theory called deconstructionism, which said words, which are merely symbolic representations of objects or thoughts, can easily be interpreted in numerous ways. (What I think when I read a word might be entirely different from what another person would think if they read the same word.) Therefore, any text is open to many interpretations—meaning that language cannot be relied on to convey truth. It also doesn’t matter what the author’s intent was, since each reader will perceive it individually. Therefore, since truth is no longer attainable through the use of language, debate is discouraged, and the only thing that matters is the pure pursuit of power to make change.

Derrida also developed the concept of de-centering. In the past, modern structuralist views of society held on to a center. This could be God, laws, man, ideology, etc., but the center, which was like an anchor for the structure, changed at different times, and history was merely “a series of substitutions of center for center” competing for the center position. Postmodernists deny
that society should be organized around a center, since, they believe, every center has failed in
the past to provide a just society. Instead, just like language, our societal centers have no true
meaning. This leaves the construction of morals and truth to be determined by each individual.

Not surprisingly, any attack on the legitimacy of language had an impact on biblical
interpretation, since the concept of doctrinal purity or scholarly analysis “is regarded with intense
suspicion by the postmodernists.”58 Michel Foucault (who studied Hegel) did an analysis of the
power relationship between the interpreter (such as a pastor, pope, or professor) and the
community and raised “questions concerning the potentially repressive function of ‘authorized’
biblical interpreters.”59 (This attempt to discredit biblical authority should not be surprising since
Foucault, a homosexual who died of AIDS in 1984, was searching for a way to normalize
behavior that was outside of the realm of societal acceptance.)

Jean-François Lyotard, another of the French philosophers, said that a simplified definition of
postmodernism was “an incredulity towards meta-narratives.”60 Again, since universal truth isn’t
found in an overarching story or narrative of history; truth can only be known through the
perspectives of individuals who lived it.

This explanation of the philosophies behind Critical Race Theory is not exhaustive, but it does
help us to have an insight into the mindset of those who developed the theory and how there are
discernable connections between the neo-Marxist/postmodern philosophers and the critical
theorists.

Is Critical Race Theory Biblical?

Although CRT is rooted in secular philosophies, its branches have now reached into the church.
Many evangelicals believe it isn’t necessary to adopt all of the ideas that form CRT, but they still
believe there are insights that can be gleaned from some of its principles. They argue that CRT
reflects “what some may say is common grace” because it has “truthful insights found in human
ideas that do not explicitly emerge from scripture,”61 but the knowledge involved in CRT isn’t
like the knowledge involved in treating an ear infection or planting crops (showing God’s
common care for His creation), instead CRT would be categorized as philosophy.

The word “philosophy” is made up of two Greek words: “philo” (love) and “sophia” (wisdom).
There are two sources of wisdom: one is named Jesus, in whom the scriptures tell us “are all the
treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3), and the other source is the world, of whom the
scriptures warn us to “beware lest any man spoil you” [take you captive] “through philosophy
and vain deceit . . . after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8). CRT has its
source in the world and can never lead to true racial reconciliation because grace and forgiveness
are against its very nature! It leads its adherents to continually find fault, accuse with a raised fist, and divide people into identity groups who are suspicious of one another. Christianity, on the other hand, offers us unity through the Cross of Jesus Christ. Paul, who was Jewish, described the way that Jesus was a beautiful source of peace and reconciliation in his letter to the Ephesian Gentiles (a different, and even dominant, racial group):

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.” (Ephesians 2:13-14)

If members of the Southern Baptist Convention had been proud and hard-hearted and hadn’t cried out in confession and repentance nearly a quarter of a century ago saying, “we lament and repudiate historic acts of evil such as slavery... and we ask forgiveness from our African-American brothers and sisters...” then perhaps the continuing criticism on the part of those who embrace CRT could be justified, but the accusations against evangelicals that are currently used by critical race theorists to justify their feelings of betrayal (evangelicals voted for President Trump, evangelicals focus on individual rather than systemic racial solutions, evangelicals are not white allies if they merely look at cases of police injustice individually rather than through the long history of racial injustice, evangelicals won’t get involved in the Black Lives Matter movement, etc.) are not indicators of racist attitudes—unless a person is using CRT as a “set of analytical tools that explain how race has and continues to function in society.”

There is no doubt that the church compromised biblical doctrine (as pointed out by Jemar Tisby in his best-selling book The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism), but this begs the question: Is the SBC making the same kind of mistake when, in the same way Christians were compromised in the past and gave place to pseudoscience and false teachings (such as the Curse of Ham) are Southern Baptists now allowing CRT to be given a place in our theological discourse? And will this addition of worldly philosophy be another instance of biblical compromise that causes division, civil war, and human suffering?

As we observe the societal destruction caused by those who adhere to CRT (efforts to abolish the police, rioting, setting up lawless “autonomous zones,” defacing property, attacking the press, violence, and extorting corporations and businesses) will the next generation look back on us with the same derision that we now have when we look back at Southern slaveholders? Will they see Resolution 9 and wonder how the church could have been a part of this?

And even though Christian critical race theorists say they do not embrace all of the concepts found in CRT (they simply cherry-pick which parts they want to believe), Resolution 9 doesn’t
delineate what portions of the theory will be embraced or rejected by the denomination, leaving the SBC open to accusations that they were complicit in all the evil which results from CRT.

The word “critical” in Critical Theory has no hidden meaning. It simply means “critical,” which is defined as “inclined to criticize, find fault.” This is the exact opposite (the antithesis) of the biblical message of grace. Some synonyms for “critical” are judgmental, disapproving, unfavorable, fault-finding, and disparaging. On the other hand, some synonyms for “grace” are favor, charity, kindness, mercy, blessing, leniency, benevolence, and clemency. How can these two diametrically opposed attitudes coexist in the church? As the apostle James asked, “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter water?” (James 3:11) This is especially applicable when there has been repentance.

The Word of God cannot be subjected to the Hegelian dialectic. Christianity cannot be synthesized with the worldly wisdom found in Critical Race Theory to form a new religion. Rather, biblical wisdom must prevail in the church, and our book of wisdom, the Proverbs, warns us:

“Every word of God is pure . . . add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.” (Proverbs 30:6)


3 See pages 12-14 for more information on scientific racism.


6 Not to be confused with classical liberalism which promotes individual freedom and free market economies.


7 Ibid., 5.

8 Ibid.


11 To those who may not have been exposed to these insights, Hall’s confession may be somewhat shocking, not only because he seems to be admitting to an attitude that is counter to all the advances in race relations that we’ve made in the United States over the last century, but also because it runs counter to Christian doctrine. “Resolution 9” promises that “Southern Baptists will carefully analyze how the information gleaned from these tools are employed” and that “Southern Baptist churches and institutions repudiate the misuse of insights gained from critical race theory” [“On Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality,” (Southern Baptist Convention)], but Hall, a leader in the SBC, is using CRT to claim that there is a sin that is beyond the reach of Christ’s cleansing and liberating power. He is suggesting that we cannot be set free from racist attitudes while we’re still in our fleshly (white) bodies, and that the power of the dominant culture is stronger than the sanctifying power of the Word in a believer’s life. But Jesus said, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:16-17). He also said, “ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).


13 Jemar Tisby, The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 16.


18 Ibid.


20 Ibid.

26 Ibid.
28 Delgado, Critical Race Theory, 8.
32 Bob Woodson, a black Christian, and founder of the “1776” initiative, a response to the New York Times-sponsored “1619 Project,” [The “1619 Project” (which is immersed in CRT) is an ongoing project of the New York Times Magazine, started by reporter Nikole Hannah-Jones in 2019 to commemorate the 400-year anniversary of the arrival of the first slaves to America. It’s an attempt to remind Americans of their racist past and the significance that slavery played in the construction of the United States.] said he was insulted at the idea that blacks need help from the white community. When asked about a letter that was signed by 1000 health professionals which said that systemic racism was a bigger health problem than COVID-19 (therefore protesting was more important than remaining quarantined) he responded:

It’s the most demeaning proposition that I could think of. It is the most patronizing thing that anyone could say about someone, that somehow your life and your destiny is not in your own hands. That somehow whatever conditions or challenges you’re facing in your community, that it is not your fault. That the fault lies outside with white America. And therefore, unless and until white America changes, there’s little expectation that life will improve inside that community. I mean, that to me is fundamentally racist.” (Bob Woodson, “How the Tragic Killing of George Floyd Has Been Exploited” (Interview on The Epoch Times, June 9, 2020, https://www.theepochtimes.com/how-the-tragic-killing-of-george-floyd-has-been-exploited-bob-woodson_3379519.html).

33 Delgado, Critical Race Theory, 9.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
37 Anderson, Race, Class, and Gender, 12.
38 Ibid.
39 Delgado, Critical Race Theory, 92.

46 Ibid.


51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., 257.

53 Heywood, Political Ideologies, 139.

54 Ibid.

55 Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man, 256.


58 Ibid., 245.

59 Ibid.


63 Jemar Tisby, The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2019), 172-191.