

Marginalizing God in the Gospel (Part 2)

Introduction

Last week, we looked at what happens when “Critical Theory” is adopted by the “church” and applied to the Gospel. This week, we want to continue learning what is the “Gospel according to Critical Theory” so that we can know better how to guard and love the true Gospel of Jesus Christ that is powerful to save. We saw this false Gospel in the Bible Project’s video on “Justice.” The **first** step in that video to a Gospel powerless to save was a subtle distinguishing between God and God’s definition of good and evil – a definition in some sense independent of God and to which God Himself conforms. The **second** step was a defining of justice and of good and evil in terms of my inherent “rights” as God’s image. The **third** step was the equating of justice with charity, mercy, and compassion. The **fourth** step was the introduction of an extra-biblical category of sin – passive and unintentional injustice (injustice having already been defined in terms of my inherent “rights” and justice having already been equated with mercy). But an extra-biblical category of “sin” always assumes, on the flip side of the coin, an extra-biblical category of “righteousness.”

I. An extra-biblical category of righteousness

“Justice *can* refer to retributive justice, like if I steal something I pay the consequences. Yet most often in the Bible *mispat* refers to restorative justice. It means going a step further. Actually seeking out vulnerable people who are being taken advantage of and helping them. Some people call this charity. But *mispat* means way more. It means taking steps to advocate for the vulnerable and changing social structures to prevent injustice. So justice and righteousness are about a radical, selfless way of life.”

“Restorative... a step *further*... seeking out... way more... **radically selfless**...” How could any good Christian argue *against* these things? Isn’t this the life that Jesus Himself calls us to live?

- Matthew 16:24 — Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

And yet even as we submit ourselves wholeheartedly to the truth and authority of Jesus’ word, it needs to be said that we are not free to invent our own “self-righteous” definitions of “radical” and “selfless.” Is it possible to have a *self-righteous* definition of *selfless*? It is. Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. And how easy it is for us to do this simply by pairing the word “radical” with “selfless.” The implication is either that all **true** selflessness *must* be “**radical**” selflessness or else that there are different levels of selflessness with “radical” being the highest level.

According to this video, the radical selflessness *required* of us all is “**seeking out** vulnerable people who are being taken advantage of and helping them.” *Any failure* to be living this **radically selfless** life (posting on Instagram and Facebook and Twitter is not enough) *is* to “participate in *injustice*, actively or passively. Even unintentionally.” And so the video can *only* logically conclude, “We’re all the **guilty** ones.” What does this mean for the Gospel, for the glory

of God, and for people's souls? The most urgent question pressing itself upon us is this: When have we done enough "active seeking out"—when have we lived radically enough; when have we loved enough—so as not to be living in this perpetual state of guilt? This is a question the video raises, but never answers. As we saw last week, even the atonement is redefined so that it provides no real solution. The video teaches that those whom God has "declared righteous" for Christ's sake may still *remain* in their pre-conversion "*guilt*" in the sense of being "morally polluted/defiled." "We're all **'the guilty ones'**" is clearly meant to apply to *all* the privileged *equally* both before and after conversion. Again, everything comes back to the use of words. "Guilt" in the sense of "moral defilement" (rather than a legal standing before the law) is expunged only by living and loving radically enough.

We know from the Bible that love is a "debt" that can never be paid off, and that's simply because of the very nature of love. "Owe no one anything," Paul says, "except to love each other" (Rom. 13:8-10). If you could love *anyone* "enough" (whether your husband or wife, or your next-door neighbor, or your co-worker, or the cashier at the grocery store), then it wouldn't be love. And yet what this video is telling us in no uncertain terms is that we must always work to be loving *everyone*—*especially* the underprivileged—more and more radically if we would ever attain freedom from this "guilt." Can you see how this video takes the beautiful, glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ and subtly transforms it into a message of works-righteousness? And so here, again, is the deifying of man and the marginalizing of God.

This video assumes *either* that there's a super-spiritual class of people who by exercising "enough" love can gain freedom from guilt *or* that there's a super-spiritual class of people who, having had their eyes opened, humbly admit to living perpetually in this state of culpable guilt even as they're always striving to live more radically. But rather than being a sign of spirituality, this is something that ought to make me question whether I'm truly saved. What does the Apostle John say?

- 1 John 3:9-10 — No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.
- 1 John 5:18 — We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

How can Luke say of Zechariah and Elizabeth:

- Luke 1:6 — They were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

How can Paul say:

- Acts 23:1 — Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.
- 1 Corinthians 4:4 — I am not aware of anything against myself...

The answer is not that they had fulfilled the law or lived radically and selflessly *enough*, but rather that they were living by faith and confessing and repenting of all known sin.

- 1 John 1:8–2:2 — If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness... My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

All of us should be able to say by God’s grace and with the utmost humility and “fear and trembling”:

- 1 Corinthians 4:4 — **I am not aware of anything against myself**, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is **the Lord** who judges me.

By defining love (a radically selfless way of life) in terms of justice (a measurable standard), Christians will be reduced **either** to the most hopeless kind of despair on the one hand (because they’re forever guilty and forever trying to love enough so as not to be guilty), **or** they will be reduced to the worst kind of hypocrisy and arrogance (because they’re part of an elite class who’ve had their eyes opened to their perpetual guilt or because they’re part of an elite class who *have* loved radically enough so as to no longer be guilty). In either case, we’ve perverted the Gospel into a works-righteousness that robs people of the true hope of eternal life.

Love, we’re told, is “actually *seeking out* vulnerable people who are being taken advantage of and helping them.” In other words, love is actively going out and *finding all* the people that I was previously ignorant of (and therefore indifferent to) and helping them. In speaking of the racism of conservative white Christians today, Ligan Duncan says: “I want to emphasize, this does not arise from some sort of [malicious ill will] against black people, it’s from utter complete **culpable** [blameworthy] ignorance and indifference. And... that’s far more harmful.” What is love, then? Love is making absolutely, positively sure that I’m ignorant of nothing and zealous for everything. Anything less than this is **culpable ignorance** and therefore **culpable indifference**. We might not want to say that (and maybe we don’t), but we have to understand that that’s what today’s Gospel is preaching. And so—**if we would not be guilty**—we must set ourselves up to be gods – omniscient, omnipresent, and ultimately sovereign, exercising an active benevolence of which only God is capable.

- Proverbs 15:3 — The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.
- Psalms 145:9 — The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

Does this *in some way* let us “off the hook”? Yes! We don’t need to bear the crushing weight of trying to play God. And what does Paul say?

- Philippians 3:7–9 — Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from

the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Does this *in some way* let us “off the hook”? Yes, it does! We don’t need to bear the crushing weight of having to achieve our own self-righteousness by living and loving radically *enough*. But no, this does not let us “off the hook” of *truly* loving our neighbor – a commandment that *in Christ* is not burdensome (cf. 1 Jn. 5:3), but “light” (cf. Mat. 11:28-30).

- Matthew 11:28–30 — Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Remember how Jesus unpacked the second great commandment in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Here was a clear-cut case of true, biblical oppression. The man who fell among robbers was not already a “victim” or already “oppressed” simply because of a class that he belonged to (no one *ever* is in the Bible), but he certainly became a victim when he was stripped, beaten, and left half dead on the road. The people sitting comfortably at home as that man was lying on the road suffering were not charged by Jesus with culpable ignorance and indifference – because they weren’t out actively looking for victims of oppression somewhere. The only guilty people in this parable are those who “by chance” were going down that same road and who saw the man lying there, and yet still passed by doing nothing. The “Good Samaritan” was not out patrolling the road looking for victims of robbery. He was “randomly” out on a journey, stumbled across the victim of violent robbery, and then did what any *true* Christian would do in the same set of circumstances – whether the victim was black or white, rich or poor, left or right, morally “straight” (heterosexual) or morally “crooked” (homosexual). Paul writes:

- Galatians 6:10 — So then, **as we have opportunity**, let us do good to everyone.

“As we have opportunity” is simply Paul’s acknowledgement that we’re not called to sit upon the throne of God and exercise an omnipotent, omnipresent benevolence over His world. Neither are we called to sit in judgment upon others for their failure to do so. *We are* called to live the lives that he has called us to live and in the living of these lives—as we have opportunity—to purposefully do good to everyone. And who will judge us for our failure to do good to everyone as we have opportunity? The only one capable of doing this is the one who sees all and knows all – including the deepest thoughts and motives of our hearts. This is why Paul writes:

- 1 Corinthians 4:2–5 (cf. Rom. 2:16; Eccl. 12:14) — Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

If the sixth step in this video to a Gospel powerless to save is the introduction of an extra-biblical category of “righteousness,” the seventh and final step is a blurring of the *biblical* line between the church and the world.

II. Blurring the Biblical line between the Church and the world

Paul says, “As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone.” The reason he says “everyone” is because it should be clear to us that our “neighbors” are not just other Christians. We don’t first ask the man who’s been beaten and left for dead on the road if he’s a Christian or if he’s not homosexual before we help him. The unbeliever is also our neighbor and Jesus even calls us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us (Lk. 6:27). Nevertheless, Paul does go on to say this:

- Galatians 6:10 — So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, **and especially to those who are of the household of faith.**

Of course, it’s those within the household of faith to whom we should naturally have the greatest number of “opportunities” to “do good.” This explains why Paul says in Romans 13:

- Romans 13:8 — Owe no one anything, except to love **each other.**

He’s not saying there’s no need to love the unbeliever, but he is saying that the majority of our opportunities for loving others will be within the body of Christ. But there’s more to Paul’s “especially” than this. The overwhelming emphasis in the Bible is on actively loving and caring for the poor and needy specifically within the boundaries of the covenant community (cf. Old Testament).

- James 2:15–16 (cf. James 1:27) — If a **brother or sister** is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?
- 1 John 3:16–18 (cf. 3:13–14) — By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives **for the brothers.** But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees **his brother** in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?
- Hebrews 13:1–3 — Let **brotherly love** continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers [travelling Christians; “Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are...”; cf. 3 Jn. 5–8], for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those [brothers and sisters] who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those [brothers and sisters] who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.
- Galatians 2:9–10 — James and Cephas and John... gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, they asked us to remember the poor [in the Jerusalem church], the very thing I was eager to do.
- Acts 11:28–30 — Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world... So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the **brothers** living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the **elders** by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

- 1 Corinthians 16:1 (cf. Acts 24:17) — Now concerning the collection **for the saints**.
- Acts 6:1 — In these days when **the disciples** were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.
- 1 Timothy 5:9–10 (cf. 5:16) — Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.
- Mark 10:29–30 — Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, **for my sake and for the gospel**, who will not receive a hundredfold **now in this time**, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.
- Acts 4:32–35 (cf. Acts 5:1–5) — Now the full number of **those who believed** were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

We really should be convicted and encouraged and exhorted by these Scriptures, shouldn't we? But why am I pointing out that the almost exclusive emphasis in the Bible is on actively loving and caring for the poor and needy specifically within the boundaries of the covenant community (this love never being defined in terms of justice)? My point is not to say that we need not care for those who aren't born again – who haven't repented and believed in Christ. My point isn't to say that we can't or shouldn't advocate for *truly* just laws in society (laws against abortion; laws against gay marriage; laws that are truly impartial and avoid all *unjust* discrimination [are we unjustly discriminating against seventeen-year-olds in not letting them vote?]). That's not the Bible's point. So what is the point?

In the video on “Justice” there's a very conspicuous omission of any redeemed, covenant community with covenantal boundaries such that there are those who are “inside” and those who are “outside” (see transcript in Part I). Part of the reason for this is that love is defined in terms of “justice”; and since justice can't be reserved “especially” for a specific group, therefore neither can love be focused “especially” on a specific group. That would be “unjust” – especially given the inherent rights of all people. And so in this way, the redemptive-theological line—not a legalistic, insulated, self-righteous line, but the essential redemptive-theological line—between the church and the world is blurred or lost. This inevitably results in the deifying of man and the marginalizing of God.

Caring for those INSIDE the covenant community is motivated by the fact that these are brothers and sisters in Christ and that what we do to them is therefore uniquely done to Christ Himself.

- Matthew 25:40 — And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, **as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers** [“those who hear the word of God and do it”; Lk. 8:21], **you did it to me.**”
- Matthew 10:40–42 — **Whoever receives you receives me**, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will

receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water **because he is a disciple**, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

What, then, is our motivation when we care for someone OUTSIDE of the covenant community? Certainly, we recognize all human beings as still the image of God. That's one major motivation. But the other major motivation (flowing out of the previous motivation) is a desire to see these people (including the poor, and the immigrant, and the vulnerable, and the *truly* oppressed of any kind) come to recognize their own guilt and the certainty of coming judgment, and repent and believe in Christ (cf. Mat. 21:28-32; Lk. 7:36-50; 15:1-7). It's in this way that the guilty poor and the guilty oppressed are not only saved spiritually, but enter into a community where they're physically and materially loved and cared for (now within the context of a mutual, loving accountability; cf. 2 Thess. 3:10). The poor may remain poor in the same covenant community with the rich; the slave may remain a slave in the same covenant community with his believing master (cf. 1 Cor. 7:20-21; 1 Tim. 6:1-2); but all are now fully "equal" and mutually loved and cared for (rich and poor, master and slave) as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the powerful working of the Gospel. Is it clear to you that in the video on "Justice," there's no room for preaching this true Gospel to the "innocent" poor and oppressed – because that would be the ultimate "oppression"?

In the false Gospel being preached today, we cannot give too much prominence to a community defined by covenant and redemption lest other communities and groups lose their own distinct and equally fundamental existence. In an episode of the "As in Heaven" podcast (published by the Gospel Coalition), one of the guests (Jerome Gay) says this: "Scripture tends to think communally. '**Let us create** man in our own image.' ... There's this group idea. There's a communal idea... And again, we see that in scripture in terms of **the Jewish community, the church... The Book of Acts is communal...** The Christian ethic [is] about looking at **the group...** It's easier for **a marginalized community** to **think communally** because in many ways you have to when you're enduring oppression." Did you see what happened there, right at the end? We went from the "community" of *Trinity* and the community of *covenant* to absolutely any kind of community anywhere in the world, thus practically setting up a kind of equivalence. So we should always be thinking in terms of the "group" no matter what the group might be because that's the spiritual way to think. In this way, we see that it's necessary for us to think of the black "group" *in* the church just as it's also necessary for us to think of the black "group" *outside* of the church.

Community is about *identity*. The participation of the Son in the Trinitarian "community" is about His fundamental identity as God. The participation of the Jew in the Old Covenant community was about his fundamental identity as a part of the people God had redeemed out of Egypt and uniquely chosen for Himself. The participation of the Christian in the New Covenant community is about his or her fundamental identity as a redeemed child of God. But what the Gospel Coalition is doing is taking this concept of the "group" and setting it up as a virtue and an end all by itself. In the quote above, we moved seamlessly from the fundamental and now all-encompassing covenant "group" to other identity groups defined by color, gender, socio-economic status, etc. We've taken the biblical language of the "community" (the language of

redemption and covenant and true identity) and applied it in a way that is wholly contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It would be wonderful if black people and white people, and men and women, and rich and poor, and slave and free all thought in terms of *the* “group” – meaning the covenant community that embraces them all as one and in which they find their true individual identity. Paul writes:

- Galatians 3:27–28 — For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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 (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13) — Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

The problem is that we’re all being taught today to think in terms of multiple “*identity groups*” that continue to exist *separately* both inside and outside of the church. But when we consciously subdivide the neighbor we’re called to love into these distinct “identity groups” this is only a way of stirring up true classism and racism in people’s hearts. This is to pervert the second “greatest commandment” with that which, in the words of the Apostle Paul, has the “appearance of wisdom” but only promotes “self-made religion” (cf. Col. 2:23). When we divide the neighbor we’re called to love into distinct identity groups, no matter how comprehensive that list might be, it’s still only a way of splintering and fragmenting rather than pursuing true, biblical “love” and affirming that fundamental, all-encompassing covenant community that God is forming *in Christ, through the Gospel*.

Conclusion

By the grace of God, let us not allow the false teachers in the church today to deceive us with what has the appearance of wisdom, but only promotes a self-made religion.

- 2 Corinthians 11:14 — Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

Let us not be led astray into a way of thinking that is contrary to the simplicity and purity of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Galatians 1:9 [NET] — If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be condemned to hell.
- 2 Corinthians 11:3 — I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

What does Paul say?

- Galatians 6:15 — Neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but [*only*] a new creation.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 — Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

Not only am *I* a new creation; *together, we* are a new creation. And the new creation is all that matters. Therefore, let us live out *who* we are by truly loving and caring for one another. And *in love*, let us never stop preaching the true Gospel to all indiscriminately, that they, too, might come to share with us in Christ.

- Romans 1:16–17 — For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”