



GETTING IT RIGHT

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A lot of today's turmoil in the world is about getting it right. Plainly, it takes time—much more time than we would like—to get it right.

In Jesus' day, it was the Pharisees who, more than anyone, wanted to get it right, because they believed, simply, that getting it right was the most important thing in life.

Matthew 22:36-40

One of them approached Jesus to ask Him, "Teacher, how can I get it right? Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is equally important: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

How tragic and unjust were the recent deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and perhaps also the more recent hangings of Robert Fuller and Malcolm Harsch.

How unbiblical racism is.

That Christians should be actively working to overcome it on all fronts is painfully obvious.

My point today is *not* to discuss our responses—there are too many possibilities. And the Holy Spirit may lead you to respond one way, while He leads someone else to respond another way. My aim is to discuss with you *how* we decide what our personal responses will be.

I have spoken to you before about the importance of developing a truly Christian, Biblical worldview, and emphasized elements of such a worldview consistently.

Jesus Christ is referred to in Scripture as the Cornerstone of God's creative and redemptive work.

A cornerstone is more than a marker with the building's name, or its architect's name, and the date of its founding... a cornerstone marks the longitude and latitude of a building and its plumbline; it sets the three dimensions of its structural integrity.

Jesus Christ does that for Christianity. If He is not the centerpiece for us, if He is not the Cornerstone from whom we derive every direction or line of thought, belief, and action—personally and corporately—then what we have is not Christianity, no matter what we call it, or how many Biblical words, images, or stories we may use to describe it.

I pull from Natasha Crain's recent blog (June 9, 2020) five points of concern for our Christian response to this moment in our lives.

POPULAR BANDWAGONS

Nearly two years ago, The Pew Forum released a nationwide study revealing a snapshot of religion in America. Their findings included these:

- Less than 40% of Americans are “highly religious” or seriously committed to their beliefs (this includes Christians, Jews, and Muslims).
- About one-fourth of the “highly religious” are what the researchers called “diversely devout,” meaning they mostly held to traditional beliefs, but also shared a variety of non-Biblical views, such as reincarnation, and psychics.
- The remainder, or about 30% of all Americans are committed to their religion, though only about two-thirds of those are actively involved in its practices.

Since that number, less than one-fifth of all Americans, includes Christians, Jews, and Muslims, the number of Christians who hold to a thoroughly Biblical worldview is a relatively small number—far from the majority of people that you may encounter.

Therefore, if a lot of people around you are jumping on a particular bandwagon, there's a really good chance that the bandwagon is, in some way, inconsistent with a Biblical worldview—that is, skewed from the founding cornerstone that God has laid in Jesus Christ.

Are you thinking about that? How can you become more mindful of this?

Ms. Crain mentions four ways:

- Read the statement of belief or core values on the sites of organizations you are thinking to support or promote. (One of the more popular justice organizations today also desires to “disrupt” the traditional family structure, and supports abortion on demand, and the erasure of all gender distinctions, among other unbiblical practices.)
- Before sending a donation, look at their public financial statements to see where their funds are actually being used. Follow the money.

- Don't copy their hashtag until you understand where it originated, what it meant to its originators, and what its likely to mean to those around you.
- Before purchasing a book to support a movement, look at who has endorsed it and ask, "Are these people I trust to represent a Biblical worldview?" Reading books you disagree with is okay, as long as you recognize that when you open its cover.

EMPATHY DOESN'T MEAN AGREEMENT

Clearly, we need more empathy in our world today! We need to listen before we speak, and especially before we make a judgment. Wholesale prejudice is at the heart of many of today's hot button issues—and most often, anti-God is at the core of that.

The need for a wider awareness in this era of a global newsfeed is certain, but the call for one-way listening that says, "Only those who feel oppressed and marginalized have the right to speak (everyone else needs to shut up and just listen)"—is patently mistaken and cannot develop understanding and peace.

Personal experience—whether tragic or blissful—is not the touchstone of truth; the Bible is. What Jesus Christ has to say on any matter is more important than my opinion—every day, and in any situation.

Therefore, sharing compassion doesn't equal agreement on response. If God cares about their abuse—and surely, He does—then so should we, but caring about the abused doesn't mean we must act only in the way they want us to. The Holy Spirit—not hurting people—has the privilege to order our steps. We want to keep in step WITH HIM.

SHAMED INTO ACCEPTANCE

If there's anything that pretty much everyone agrees on today, it's that we need to love one another. But secular expressions of love and Christians expressions don't always coincide.

Jesus has said that one commandment is the greatest. That implies at least two things: (1) There *are* other commandments (the greatest one has not supplanted all the rest), and (2) All other commandments must be understood, viewed, and practiced *in the light* of the greatest one.

This is why listening without caring falls short. And why giving without loving doesn't satisfy. And this is why loving people without *first* loving God cannot reach love's potential.

A secular world loves other people according to self-defined standards, but a “highly religious” Christian must love others according to God’s standards. Like oil and water, the two don’t often mix, which is why Christians so often clash with the culture on what love is—we start from different bases, and have different objectives.

If someone tries to shame you for not being “loving,” remind yourself (and perhaps them) that loving others in God’s way means wanting for others what God wants for them—even if that’s not what they want for themselves.

CRITICAL THEORY

Critical Theory is an ideology that views the world through a lens of power—dividing people into groups of the oppressed and the oppressors, along various social axes, like black-white, straight-gay, strong-weak, haves-have nots. (Critical Race Theory is its step-child.) In Critical Theory, all truth becomes relative to your group status.

This worldview was first developed in Germany in the 1930s and steered much of the tragic history of that era. It is not new. It is not enlightened. It is not Biblical. Let the buyer beware.

DEMONSTRATE A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

Most everyone intuitively knows three things:

- human life is intrinsically valuable
- there are things that are objectively wrong
- justice matters

Yet, none of these things is consistent with a godless or Christless worldview.

If God doesn’t exist, the universe came into existence by chance, the first living cell developed from non-living matter by chance, and all living things are the eventual product of the blind, undirected process of evolution. If that’s the case, then, human life is no more valuable than dust, and there is no basis for saying that any life matters. Only if there is an Author of life, who created and imbued us with a meaning greater than our physical parts, can lives actually matter, and in an equal way.

If God doesn’t exist, there’s also no objective standard for labeling any action—such as murder—wrong. If we’re all just the product of blind, purposeless forces, then, morality is just an opinion. Unless there is a higher-than-human Moral Authority, no one has a basis for claiming that murder is objectively wrong.

And finally, if God doesn't exist, the concept of justice is meaningless, because there can be no right or wrong in the first place to require justice. C.S. Lewis famously described the process of his own conviction during his conversion to Christianity with these words: "My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?"

Justice requires a standard, but a purposeless universe offers no objective standard. The desire for justice is a beautiful thing, but it is rooted in the reality that our God is a just God. Still, it is possible to seek justice in ungodly ways.

If we don't check our impulses and our responses to the culture of our day, we may forfeit the Gospel's influence of the culture, and risk becoming influenced *by* the culture more than by the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures.

Standards matter, but their quality is derived from their source (and that is more than mere appearance, for "the letter kills, but the spirit gives life").

Christians, by definition, have only one Master, who has called us to *follow Him*. We dare not follow another.

Lord God, You have sown our hearts with the good seed of the Gospel. Now pull from our hearts and minds the weeds of worldliness and human pride. Govern our efforts by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, for many will say in that Day, "Did we not do many marvelous works in Your name?" Yet, You will say, "Away with you. I never knew you."

Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with love—but not just any love—*Your* love; the love that seeks Your best intention for another person.

Grant that we may live in that powerful current, in spite of our broken selfhood, by faith's reliance on Your presence and grace, for the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen.