

LIVING IN THE FAMILY:
THOUGHTS FROM WILLIAM
GOUGE

Joel R. Beeke

THE POWER OF THE TWO-
PARENT HOME

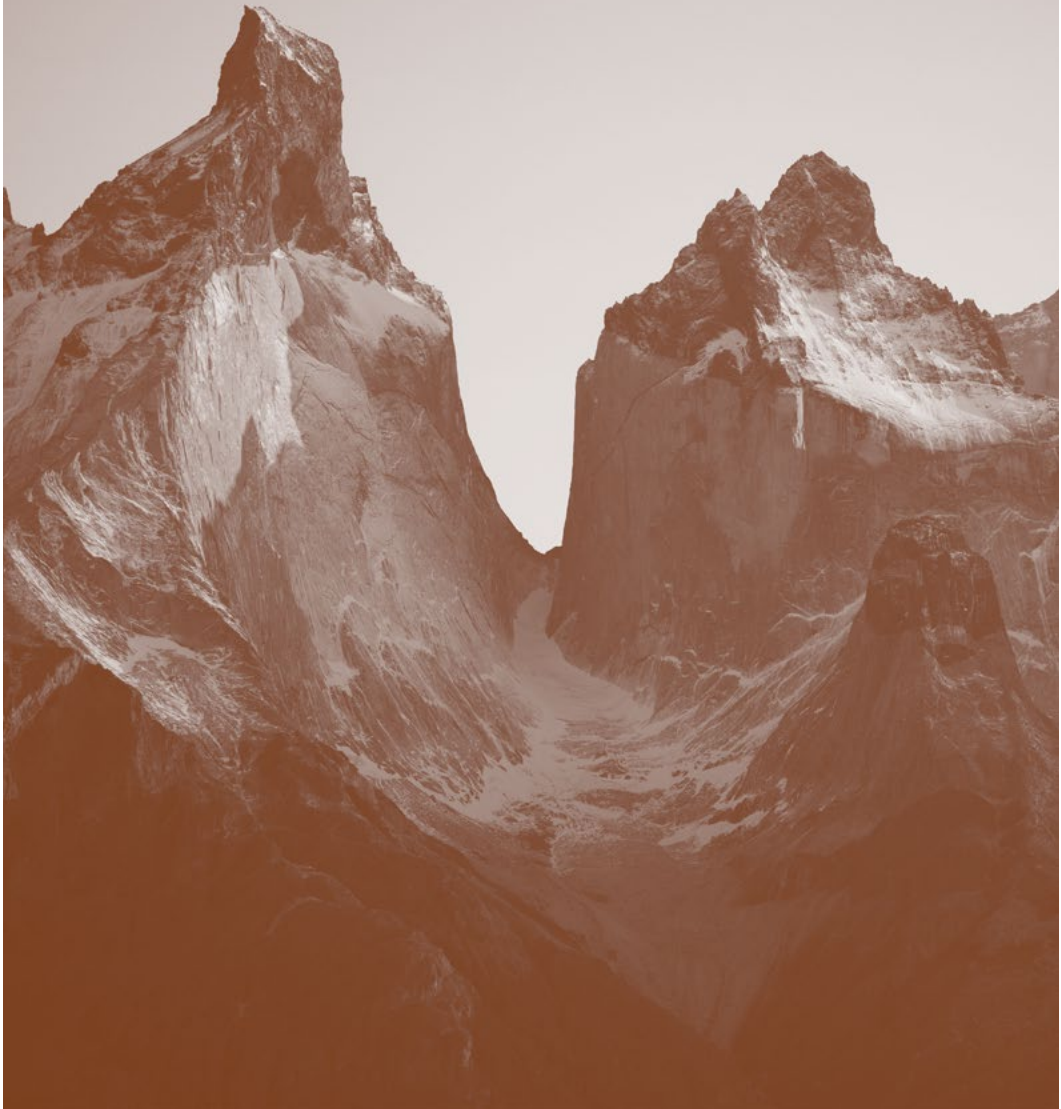
Kevin DeYoung

INDICATIVES, IMPERATIVES, AND
APPLICATIONS: REFLECTIONS ON
NATURAL, BIBLICAL, AND CULTURAL
COMPLEMENTARIANISM

Joe Rigney

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A Journal for Biblical Anthropology



Ten Resources That Have Helped Me Make Sense of Our Current Culture and How Christians Are Responding to It

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"[Worldliness] makes sin look normal and righteousness seem strange."

—DAVID WELLS¹

"World is the bad part of culture."

—JOHN FRAME²

Our culture is rapidly making sin look normal and righteousness seem strange. The bad part of our culture seems to be getting worse so quickly that it is hard to keep up. Even a socially liberal tennis champion such as Martina Navratilova can shine brightly one moment (she is a lesbian who promotes homosexuality) and flame out the next because she has not kept up with the leftward march (she believes that males who identify as “trans women” should not compete in women’s sports). J. K. Rowling, author of the best-selling Harry Potter series, was a cutting-edge voice for feminism one moment but now is canceled because her old-fashioned feminism doesn’t embrace every aspect of transgenderism.

What is happening in our culture? I approach that question not as a culture expert but as a pastor and theologian. My main burden is to do what Titus 1:9 says that an elder must do: “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and

¹Worldliness is “that system of values, in any given age, which has at its center our fallen human perspective, which displaces God and his truth from the world, and which makes sin look normal and righteousness seem strange. It thus gives great plausibility to what is morally wrong and, for that reason, makes what is wrong seem normal.” David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4.

²John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 866. Cf. Andrew David Naselli, “Do Not Love the World: Breaking the Evil Enchantment of Worldliness (A Sermon on 1 John 2:15–17),” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22.1 (2018): 111–25.

also to rebuke those who contradict it.” As an elder or pastor, I must not only be able to teach sound doctrine, I also must be able to rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine. That is part of shepherding. That is why over the past several years I have been attempting to better understand our current culture and how Christians are responding to it.

The speed at which our culture is changing in a progressive direction is astonishing. To better understand our current culture, I have prioritized reading *books* that summarize and reflect on the bigger picture. If you try to make sense of our current culture primarily by watching the news or following news stories on social media, it may be challenging to step back and evaluate the big picture.³

I would like to share with you ten resources that have helped me make sense of our current culture and make sense of how Christians are responding to it. The first five resources are books by non-Christians (I), and the second five resources are by Christians (II).

Caveat: The following ten resources have helped me better understand troubling aspects of our current culture *primarily from the left*. There are problems from the right, such as bizarre conspiracy theories⁴ and “the syncretistic blending of Christianity and Americana.”⁵ However, as George Yancey demonstrates, “Progressive Christians stress political values more than conservative Christians.”⁶ Those moving to the left seem markedly aggressive and intolerant. My pastoral sense is that in our culture at this time problems from the left are a

bigger danger than problems from the right — at least for the church I help shepherd and for churches similar to ours.⁷

I. FIVE BOOKS BY NON-CHRISTIANS

1. *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting up a Generation for Failure*⁸

Greg Lukianoff is an attorney who specializes in free speech, and Jonathan Haidt is a social psychologist at New York University who previously taught psychology for sixteen years at the University of Virginia. Their book argues against what they call “three Great Untruths” that have become culturally common:

1. The Untruth of Fragility: What doesn’t kill you makes you weaker.
2. The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: Always trust your feelings.
3. The Untruth of Us Versus Them: Life is a battle between good people and evil people.

Here are two excerpts from their book that were “aha” moments for me when I read them. The first excerpt explains how some people now use the word *trauma* in a broader way:

Take the word “trauma.” In the early versions of the primary manual of psychiatry, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), psychiatrists used the word “trauma” only to describe a physical agent causing physical damage, as in the case of what we now call traumatic brain injury. In the 1980 revision, however, the manual (DSM III) recognized “post-traumatic stress disorder” as a mental disorder—the first type of traumatic injury that isn’t physical. PTSD is caused by an extraordinary and terrifying experience, and the criteria for a traumatic event that warrants a diagnosis of PTSD were (and are) strict: to qualify, an event would have to “evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone” and be “outside the range of usual human experience.” The DSM III emphasized that the event was not

³For what it is worth, here are some ways I attempt to keep up with the news day-to-day: (1) I listen to two podcasts on weekday mornings: “The World and Everything in It” (the same organization as *WORLD* magazine) and “The Briefing” by Al Mohler. (2) I read the headlines and some stories from various news organizations. Those include *The Babylon Bee* and *Not the Bee*. The first is satire, and the second is news; but sometimes it is hard to distinguish the two! (3) I listen to reasonable voices online such as Megan Basham, Voddie Baucham, Kevin Bauder, Denny Burk, Abigail Dodds, Dave Doran, Mark Dever, Kevin DeYoung, Abigail Dodds, Phil Johnson, Jonathan Leeman, John MacArthur, Al Mohler, John Piper, Joe Rigney, David Schrock, Neil Shenvi, Colin Smothers, Owen Strachan, Justin Taylor, Carl Trueman, Andrew Walker, and Doug Wilson. I gratefully learn from them, even while they don’t always share the same convictions and instincts. (They are mostly 3s and 4s in Kevin DeYoung’s taxonomy—see below.) (4) I correspond confidentially with trusted and courageous friends. Face-to-face conversations, email exchanges, and text-message threads are far better than public exchanges on social media. (5) I intentionally do not watch the news since what drives that content and delivery is what gets higher ratings: anger, fear, and salaciousness.

⁴E.g., Joe Carter, “The FAQs: What Christians Should Know about QAnon,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 20 May 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-faqs-what-christians-should-know-about-qanon/>.

⁵Kevin DeYoung, “What to Do with Christian Nationalism,” *WORLD Opinions*, 18 November 2021, <https://wng.org/opinions/what-to-do-with-christian-nationalism-1637239282>. That is why my fellow Bethlehem Baptist Church elders recently stated, “We reject any attempt to fuse together one’s national/political identity with one’s Christian identity in a way that equates or conflates allegiance to country with allegiance to God.” Bethlehem Baptist Church Elders, “Ethnic Harmony Affirmations and Denials,” 6 February 2021, <https://bethlehem.church/ethnic-harmony-affirmations-and-denials/>.

⁶George Yancey, “Who’s More Political: Progressive or Conservative Christians?,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 29 April 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/political-progressive-conservative-christians/>. See George A. Yancey and Ashlee Quosigk, *One Faith No Longer: The Transformation of Christianity in Red and Blue America* (New York: New York University Press, 2021).

⁷I originally prepared this article as a presentation for the Young Adult Ministry (ages 18–29) of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mounds Views, Minnesota, on June 29, 2021.

⁸Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting up a Generation for Failure* (New York: Penguin, 2018). See also Neil Shenvi, “Villains, Victims, and Visionaries: Three Books for Understanding Our Culture,” *Neil Shenvi—Apologetics*, 1 June 2021, <https://shenviapologetics.com/villains-victims-and-visionaries-three-books-for-understanding-our-culture/>.

based on a *subjective standard*. It had to be something that would cause most people to have a severe reaction. War, rape, and torture were included in this category. Divorce and simple bereavement (as in the death of a spouse due to natural causes), on the other hand, were not, because they are normal parts of life, even if unexpected. These experiences are sad and painful, but pain is not the same thing as trauma. People in these situations that don't fall into the "trauma" category might benefit from counseling, but they generally recover from such losses without any therapeutic interventions. In fact, even most people who do have traumatic experiences recover completely without intervention.

By the early 2000s, however, the concept of "trauma" within parts of the therapeutic community had crept down so far that it included anything "experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful . . . with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being." The subjective experience of "harm" became definitional in assessing trauma. As a result, the word "trauma" became much more widely used, not just by mental health professionals but by their clients and patients—including an increasing number of college students.

As with trauma, a key change for most of the concepts Haslam examined was the shift to a *subjective standard*. It was not for anyone else to decide what counted as trauma, bullying, or abuse; if it felt like that to you, trust your feelings. If a person reported that an event was traumatic (or bullying or abusive), his or her subjective assessment was increasingly taken as sufficient evidence. And if a rapidly growing number of students have been diagnosed with a mental disorder (as we'll see in chapter 7), then there is a rapidly growing need for the campus community to protect them.⁹

Lukianoff and Haidt are drawing on an insightful article by Nick Haslam called "Concept Creep."¹⁰ The idea is that the definition of certain concepts — like *trauma* and *abuse* — expand. It used

to be that someone might have trauma from being bombed in a foxhole during a battle; now a student may claim to have trauma because the teacher disagreed with the student's opinion. This insight helps me because many people in our culture (including some Christians) are claiming to be victims of "trauma" and "abuse" in line with these new definitions.¹¹

The second excerpt critiques what the authors call an "absurd" regulation of speech on American college campuses:

Vague and Overbroad Speech Codes: The code that epitomized the vagueness and breadth of the first wave of modern PC speech codes (roughly, the late 1980s to the mid-1990s) was the University of Connecticut's ban on "inappropriately directed laughter." The school was sued. It dropped the code as part of a settlement in 1990, but the same code, verbatim, was in effect at Drexel University in Philadelphia fifteen years later. That code was eventually repealed after being named one of FIRE's "Speech Codes of the Month." Along similar lines, a speech code at Alabama's Jacksonville State University provided that "no student shall offend anyone on University property," and the University of West Alabama's code prohibited "harsh text messages or emails." These codes teach students to use an overbroad and entirely subjective standard for determining wrongdoing. They also exemplify the Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: *Always trust your feelings. If you feel offended, then a punishable offense must have occurred.* Speech codes like these teach the Untruth of Fragility as well. They communicate that offensive speech or inappropriate laughter might be so damaging that administrators must step in to protect vulnerable and fragile students. And they empower college administrators to ensure that authority figures are always available to "resolve" verbal conflicts.¹²

This insight helps me because many people in our culture (including some Christians) are essentially arguing, "I'm hurt; therefore, you are unjust." Or to use the theological category of sin, "I'm hurt; therefore, you sinned."

⁹Lukianoff and Haidt, *Coddling of the American Mind*, 25–26 (bold emphasis added).

¹⁰Nick Haslam, "Concept Creep: Psychology's Expanding Concepts of Harm and Pathology," *Psychological Inquiry: An International Journal for the Advancement of Psychological Theory* 27 (2016): 1–17.

¹¹We should all oppose *abuse* if that refers to the biblical category *oppression*—that is, sinfully treating someone in a cruel and violent way. For example, Pharaoh oppresses God's people at the beginning of Exodus (Exod 1:12; 3:9). My concern is that *trauma* and *abuse* have become what I call "Gumby" words—words that people can stretch to encompass so many circumstances that the words become unhelpfully flexible, vague, and subjective.

¹²Lukianoff and Haidt, *Coddling of the American Mind*, 202 (bold emphasis added).



2. *The Rise of Victimhood Culture: Microaggressions, Safe Spaces, and the New Culture Wars*¹³

Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning are both professors of sociology (Campbell at California State University in Los Angeles and Manning at West Virginia University). Their book builds on an article they wrote in 2014 — an article that gained attention after Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt highlighted it in their work on the coddling of the American mind.

Microaggressions are small slights and insults, sometimes invisible to the person perpetuating them, such as one person asking another, “Where are you from?” Some people oppose “the microaggression program” because “microaggression complaints violate many longstanding social norms, such as those encouraging people to have thick skin, brush off slights, and charitably interpret the intentions of others.”¹⁴ In other words, those who oppose the microaggression program argue that “someone’s interpretation of another person’s action” should not matter “more than the intention of the actor.”¹⁵

Campbell and Manning explain,

Microaggression complaints arise from a culture of victimhood in which individuals and groups display a high sensitivity to slight, have a tendency to handle conflicts through complaints to authorities and other third parties,

and seek to cultivate an image of being victims who deserve assistance. This new moral culture, we shall see, differs sharply from other moral cultures—such as cultures of honor, where people are sensitive to slight but handle their conflicts aggressively, and cultures of dignity, where people ignore slights and insults. The current debate about microaggressions arises from a clash between dignity culture and the newer culture of victimhood. The debate is polarized because the moral assumptions of each side are so different.¹⁶

Complaints about microaggressions combine the sensitivity to slight that we see in honor cultures with the willingness to appeal to authorities and other third parties that we see in dignity cultures. And victimhood culture differs from both honor and dignity cultures in highlighting rather than downplaying the complainants’ victimhood.¹⁷

This victimhood culture permeates universities and corporations, which now commonly train people to avoid microaggressions that trigger victims (e.g., mansplaining, whitesplaining, straightsplaining, slut shaming, fat shaming, body shaming, cultural appropriation, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, misgendering, cissexism, transphobia, toxic masculinity).¹⁸

Microaggression complaints are similar to and different from other ways of handling conflict. First of all, they involve the public airing of grievances—complaining to outsiders. In this way microaggression complaints belong to a larger class of conflict tactics in which people who have grievances appeal to third parties. Second, microaggression complaints are attempts to demonstrate a pattern of injustice, and in this way they belong to a class of tactics by which people persuade reluctant third parties that their cause is just and they badly need help. And third, microaggression complaints are complaints about the domination and oppression of cultural minorities.¹⁹

It is not uncommon for self-identified victims to make false accusations against individuals and groups. Sometimes such

¹³Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, *The Rise of Victimhood Culture: Microaggressions, Safe Spaces, and the New Culture Wars* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). See also Shenvi, “Villains, Victims, and Visionaries.”

¹⁴Campbell and Manning, *The Rise of Victimhood Culture*, 3.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 87–88.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 40 (pp. 40–65 unpack this).

"Greater victimhood can mean greater power:"

hoaxes start a moral panic that weakens the due process that should protect the accused.²⁰ (This makes it more difficult to care for genuine victims.)

Greater victimhood can mean greater power: “Those who combine many victim identities will claim and be accorded greater moral status than those with only a few.”²¹ A primary way to obtain victim status is to claim that others have harmed you with their words: “Some campus activists have even begun to argue that speech that harms the powerless is actually violence, or something akin to it.”²²

These insights about victimhood culture help me because many people in our culture (including some Christians) have embraced this victim mindset.²³ For some there’s an allure to being a victim because it gives you more social capital and power. (This is one reason among others that some white people identify as transgender. They think it turns them from an oppressor into an oppressed minority.)

3. *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Identity, Morality*²⁴

Douglas Murray is a gay British journalist. Warning: His language is salty and sometimes explicit. His book has four chapters: “Gay,” “Women,” “Race,” and “Trans.” As Murray addresses these controversial topics, he does not fit the “politically correct” mold at all. He repeatedly highlights how mainstream culture is hypocritical, illogical, and intolerant as it views society as a system of power relations in line with Michel Foucault’s philosophy.²⁵ Here is an excerpt from each chapter:

Chapter 1, “Gay”: “Gay stories are crow-barred into any and all areas of news.”²⁶

Chapter 2, “Women”: Even though science proves that men and women are significantly different, “Our societies have

doubled-down on the delusion that biological difference — including aptitude differences — can be pushed away, denied or ignored.”²⁷

Chapter 3, “Race”: Martin Luther King Jr. “dreamed his children should ‘one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.’” But now, “Skin colour is everything,” Robin DeAngelo, author of *White Fragility*, tells audiences “how white people who see people as individuals rather than by their skin colour are in fact ‘dangerous’ Meaning that it took only half a century for Martin Luther King’s vision to be exactly inverted.”²⁸

Chapter 4, “Trans”: “The women who have tripped on the trans tripwire over recent years have a number of things in common, but one is that they have all been at the forefront of every women’s issue. And this makes perfect sense. For if a significant amount of modern rights campaigning is based on people wishing to prove that their cause is a hardware issue, then trans forces other movements to go in precisely the opposite direction. Trans campaigners intent on arguing that trans is hardware can only win their argument if they persuade people that being a woman is a matter of software. And not all feminists are willing to concede that one.”²⁹

Murray’s insights helped me better understand our culture’s groundswell and activism for LGBT, Critical Theory, and Critical Race Theory. What Murray calls “the madness of crowds” has contributed to rapidly changing our culture, a change that has been influencing how some Christians view the world now.

4. *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody*³⁰

Helen Pluckrose is editor-in-chief of *Areo Magazine*, and James Lindsay is a mathematician and political commentator.

²⁰Ibid., 105–34.

²¹Ibid., 167–68. Cf. Rosaria Butterfield, “Intersectionality and the Church,” *Tabletalk*, 1 March 2020, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/intersectionality-and-the-church-2020-02/>.

²²Campbell and Manning, *The Rise of Victimhood Culture*, 225.

²³Cf. Akos Balogh, “Beware the Dangers of a Victim Mentality,” *The Gospel Coalition | Australia*, 8 December 2020, <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/beware-the-dangers-of-a-victim-mentality/>. Even *The New Yorker* finds “the trauma plot” tiring: Parul Sehgal, “The Case against the Trauma Plot,” *The New Yorker*, 27 December 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/01/03/the-case-against-the-trauma-plot>.

²⁴Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Identity, Morality* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019). See also the review by Neil Shenvi, 23 May 2020, <https://shenviapologetics.com/madness-and-its-discontents-a-short-review-of-murrays-madness-of-crowds/>.

²⁵Cf. Kevin DeYoung, “We Live in Confusing Times: The Progressives Can’t Keep Their Story Straight on Sex and Gender,” *WORLD Opinions*, 22 February 2022, <https://wng.org/opinions/the-manly-virtue-of-magnanimity-1645529342>.

²⁶Murray, *The Madness of Crowds*, 20.

²⁷Ibid., 64.

²⁸Ibid., 121, 173.

²⁹Ibid., 210.

³⁰Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020). See also Shenvi, “Villains, Victims, and Visionaries.” Shenvi also reviewed *Cynical Theories* for *Themelios* in April 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/cynical-theories-how-activist-scholarship-made-everything-about-race-gender-and-identity-and-why-this-harms-everybody/>. See also the review by Tim Challies, 26 August 2020, <https://www.challies.com/book-reviews/how-everything-became-about-race-gender-and-identity/>.

“It (intersectionality) does the same thing over and over again: look for the power imbalances, bigotry, and biases that it assumes must be present and pick at them.”

They are philosophically liberal and support liberal feminism and LGBT equality for “sexual minorities,” and they oppose what they call the “Social Justice Movement” or “wokeism.”

They trace how influential people have applied postmodernism to postcolonial theory, queer theory, critical race theory and intersectionality, feminism and gender studies, and disability and fat studies. And they show how all that connects to the Social Justice Movement.

There is nothing complex about the overarching idea of intersectionality, or the Theories upon which it is built. Nothing could be simpler. It does the same thing over and over again: look for the power imbalances, bigotry, and biases that it assumes must be present and pick at them. It reduces everything to one single variable, one single topic of conversation, one single focus and interpretation: prejudice, as understood under the power dynamics asserted by Theory. Thus, for example, disparate outcomes can have one, and only one, explanation, and it is prejudicial bigotry. The question is just identifying how it manifests in the given situation. Thus, it always assumes that, in every situation, some form of Theoretical prejudice exists and we must find a way to show evidence of it. In that sense, it is a tool—a “practice”—designed to flatten all complexity and nuance so that it can promote identity politics, in accordance with its vision.³¹

We now have Social Justice texts—forming a kind of Gospel of Social Justice—that express, with absolute certainty, that all white people are racist, all men are sexist, racism and sexism are systems that can exist and oppress absent even a single person with racist or sexist intentions or beliefs (in the

usual sense of the terms), sex is not biological and exists on a spectrum, language can be literal violence, denial of gender identity is killing people, the wish to remedy disability and obesity is hateful, and everything needs to be decolonized. That is the reification of the postmodern political principle. ... Social Justice scholarship has become a kind of Theory of Everything, a set of unquestionable Truths with a capital T, whose central tenets were taken from the original postmodernists and solidified within the derived Theories.³²

They summarize “Critical Race Theory” and intersectionality as “ending racism by seeing it everywhere.”³³

Social Justice Theorists have created a new religion, a tradition of faith that is actively hostile to reason, falsification, disconfirmation, and disagreement of any kind. Indeed, the whole postmodernist project now seems, in retrospect, like an unwitting attempt to have deconstructed the old metanarratives of Western thought—science and reason along with religion and capitalist economic systems—to make room for a wholly new religion, a postmodern faith based on a dead God, which sees mysterious worldly forces in systems of power and privilege and which sanctifies victimhood. This, increasingly, is the fundamentalist religion of the nominally secular left.³⁴

I first read this book in early September 2020 — after three months of rapid cultural change following George Floyd’s death on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis (while I was living in the Minneapolis area). As the ideologies of Robin DiAngelo and Ibram X. Kendi became how-to manuals in mainstream culture,³⁵ the insights in this book helped me better make sense of what has happened in secular culture as well as parts of conservative, Reformed evangelicalism.

5. *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*³⁶

Edwin Friedman was an ordained Jewish rabbi and practicing

³²Ibid., 183.

³³Ibid., 111; cf. 133–34.

³⁴Ibid., 210–11.

³⁵See Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s so Hard to Talk to White People about Racism* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2018); Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: Random House, 2019).

³⁶Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, ed. Margaret M. Treadwell and Edward W. Beal, 2nd ed. (New York: Church, 2017). Cf. this 75-page PDF: Alastair J. Roberts, *Self and Leadership: A Summary of and Engagement with Edwin Friedman’s A Failure of Nerve*, 2016, <https://alastairadversaria.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/self-and-leadership.pdf>.

³¹Pluckrose and Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, 128.

family therapist who died in 1996. When I recently read his book, I was astounded with his common-grace insights about leadership that directly apply to parents, pastors, and professors. (Friedman doesn't even give a hint that he is a theist; to the contrary, naturalistic evolution is foundational to his therapeutic framework.)

Many Christians right now are attempting to highlight the danger that *strong* leaders can hurt people.³⁷ Friedman highlights the insidious danger that *weak* leaders can hurt people. Weak leaders can fail in two crucial areas:

1. A failure of *discernment* (especially because of untethered empathy or enmeshment that hinders how others grow by affirming their low pain threshold)³⁸
2. A failure of *nerve* (especially by fearing to take stands at the risk of displeasing people)

People in our culture can be highly reactive and anxious and combustible—like a gas leak that can explode with just a spark. Or to change the metaphor, people in our culture can be like a body with a weak immune system that is defenseless against all kinds of diseases. Friedman argues, “Leaders function as the immune systems of their institutions.”³⁹ Good leaders are stable and sober-minded. Good leaders do not anxiously react to highly reactive people by herding the whole group to adapt to the least mature members of the group. Good leaders don't let criticism ruin them but recognize that criticism comes with the territory of good leadership.

II. FIVE RESOURCES BY CHRISTIANS

The following five resources by Christians have also helped me make sense of our current culture and make sense of how Christians are responding to it.

³⁷E.g., “The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill” podcast by Mike Cospoer for Christianity Today, June 21–December 4, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/>. Cf. Brian J. Tabb, “What Makes a ‘Good’ Church? Reflections on A Church Called Tov,” *Them* 46 (2021): 483–93.

³⁸See the section “Joe Rigney on Untethered Empathy” below.

³⁹Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 19.

“Leaders function as the immune systems of their institutions.”

1. Neil Shenvi on Critical Theory and Social Justice⁴⁰

Neil Shenvi earned a PhD in theoretical chemistry from the University of California, Berkeley, and in 2015 — after five years of working at Duke University — he began focusing on home-schooling his four children. He is a member of the Summit Church, pastored by J. D. Greear.

Shenvi has become a specialist on Critical Theory by painstakingly reading primary sources and interacting with scholars and others on the issue. He explains that Critical Theory has four central premises:

1. *Social binary*: “Society is divided into oppressed and oppressor groups.” Shenvi often highlights the below table from a book by New York Times Bestselling author Robin DiAngelo that presents Critical Theory as the truth.
2. *Oppression through ideology*: “The dominant group maintains power by imposing their ideology on everyone.”
3. *Lived experience*: “‘Lived experience’ gives oppressed groups privileged access to truths.”
4. *Social justice*: Society needs “social justice” — that is, “the elimination of all forms of social oppression” (i.e., not just race and ethnicity but also gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability, mental ability, economic class, etc.).⁴¹

These four premises help make sense of tables like the one below, “Group Identities Across Relations of Power.”⁴²

⁴⁰Neil Shenvi—Apologetics,” <https://shenviapologetics.com/>.

⁴¹Neil Shenvi, “Social Justice, Critical Theory, and Christianity: Are They Compatible?—Part 2,” *Neil Shenvi—Apologetics*, 5 January 2020, <https://shenviapologetics.com/social-justice-critical-theory-and-christianity-are-they-compatible-part-2-2/>.

⁴²This table is from Özlem Sensoy and Robin J. DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*, 2nd ed., Multicultural Education Series (New York: Teachers College, 2017), 64.

Minority/Target Group	Oppression	Dominant/ Agent Group
Peoples of Color	Racism	White
Poor; Working Class; Middle Class	Classism	Owning Class
Women; Transgender; Genderqueer	Sexism	(cis)Men
Gays; Lesbians; Bisexuals; Two Spirit	Heterosexism	Heterosexuals
Muslims; Buddhists; Jews; Hindus; and other non-Christian groups	Religions Oppression; Anti-Semitism	Christians
People with Disabilities	Ableism	Able-bodied
Immigrants (perceived)	Nationalism	Citizens (perceived)
Indigenous Peoples	Colonialism	White Settlers

The book reviews and articles on Shenvi’s website have been enormously helpful to me.⁴³ He has also teamed up for several articles with Pat Sawyer, a college professor with a PhD in education and cultural studies.⁴⁴ Shenvi is characteristically fair, clear, penetrating, discerning, reasonable, and kind.

Shenvi’s work has been an incredibly helpful resource for me over the past several years as I have tried to better understand the Critical Social Justice cultural revolution. But Shenvi is not the only Christian who is helpfully addressing

Critical Theory. Others include Thaddeus Williams,⁴⁵ Voddie Baucham,⁴⁶ and Owen Strachan.⁴⁷ I have also attempted to address the issue of ethnic harmony.⁴⁸

2. Joe Rigney on Untethered Empathy⁴⁹

Joe Rigney is president of Bethlehem College & Seminary, a pastor of Cities Church in St. Paul, and a teacher at Desiring God. Most people assume that empathy is always virtuous. Rigney (and others) explain how empathy can be sinful.

In an insightful interview with Doug Wilson that draws on insights from Edwin Friedman’s *A Failure of Nerve* (see above), Joe Rigney distinguishes between sympathy and empathy. He defines *sympathy* as showing compassion, and he defines (untethered) *empathy* as joining people in their darkness and distress and refusing to make any judgments. He uses the analogy of how to help someone who is sinking in quicksand: you could show sympathy by attempting to help him get out of the pit (e.g., by holding firmly to a branch with one hand while reaching into the pit with the other), or you could show (untethered) empathy by jumping into the pit with him.⁵⁰ Rigney is criticizing what C. S. Lewis calls “blackmail.” Lewis describes how a child “sulked in the attic” instead of apologizing in order to provoke others to give in and apologize to the sulking child.⁵¹

⁴³For Shenvi’s book reviews, see <https://shenviapologetics.com/book-reviews/>. For a sampling of his articles, see “Intro to Critical Theory,” 20 March 2019, <https://shenviapologetics.com/intro-to-critical-theory/>; “An Antiracism Glossary,” 5 September 2018, <https://shenviapologetics.com/an-antiracism-glossary/>; “Social Justice, Critical Theory, and Christianity: Are They Compatible?,” 5 January 2020, <https://shenviapologetics.com/social-justice-critical-theory-and-christianity-are-they-compatible-part-1-2/>.

⁴⁴See Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, *Engaging Critical Theory and the Social Justice Movement* (Merrillville, IN: Ratio Christi, 2019); Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, “Gender, Intersectionality, and Critical Theory,” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1.2 (2019): 75–81; Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, “Critical Theory and the Social Justice Movement,” *Journal of Christian Legal Thought* 10.1 (2020): 10–13; Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, “Do Whites Need Corporate Repentance for Historical Racial Sins?,” *Neil Shenvi—Apologetics*, 5 August 2020, <https://shenviapologetics.com/do-whites-need-corporate-repentance-for-historical-sins/>; Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, “Facing Woke Religion, the Gospel Is Still Good News,” *The American Conservative*, 4 May 2021, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/facing-woke-religion-the-gospel-is-still-good-news/>.

⁴⁵Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020). See the review by Neil Shenvi, 8 April 2021, <https://shenviapologetics.com/whose-justice-a-short-review-of-williams-confronting-injustice-without-compromising-truth/>. This is the most winsome book I am aware of to share with someone who tends to be sympathetic with “wokeness.” See also Thaddeus Williams, “Is Critical Race Theory a Helpful Tool? Or Is It a Broken Ideology That Glosses Over True Injustices?” *WORLD Opinions*, 22 March 2022, <https://wng.org/opinions/is-critical-race-theory-a-helpful-tool-1647945468>.

⁴⁶Voddie Baucham, *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism’s Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, D.C.: Salem, 2021). Baucham is courageous and valiant for truth, even if that means disappointing friends and losing elements of his platform. And his personal story is so powerful: a black American man who descended from African slaves, grows up with a non-Christian single mother in gang-infested Los Angeles, becomes a Christian in college, studies sociology and theology, earns a master’s degree and doctoral degree, adopts seven (!) black children, pastors predominantly black churches in Texas and then predominantly white churches in Texas and then moves to Zambia, etc. Baucham is a Thomas Sowell or Clarence Thomas of conservative evangelicalism. It is helpful to distinguish between those who (1) are knowing advocates of Critical Social Justice, (2) are sympathetic to it, or (3) have unwillingly taken on aspects of it. There is a messy middle here. Many good people are either not well-informed or misinformed on Critical Theory, and then they get out over their skis in public forums. In this book Baucham targets that first group and flags the second and third. It is wise to show some latitude for those who are still working these things out in their own contexts, even as we are seeing the “camps” progressively gain clarity on these issues. Baucham helps us do that, though I disagree with how he negatively portrays some faithful and reasonable brothers such as Jonathan Leeman and John Piper.

⁴⁷Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement Is Hijacking the Gospel* (Washington, D.C.: Salem, 2021). This book is similar to Voddie Baucham’s, but it does not call out specific conservative evangelicals the way Baucham’s book does.

⁴⁸Andrew David Naselli, “What the Bible Teaches about Ethnic Harmony,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 19.2 (2020): 14–57. See also Kevin DeYoung, *Faith Seeking Understanding: Thinking Theologically about Racial Tensions* (Matthews, NC: The Gospel Coalition, 2020), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/thinking-theologically-about-racial-tensions-series/>.

⁴⁹See Andrew David Naselli, “How Empathy Can Be Sinful,” *Andy Naselli*, 2 May 2020, <https://andynaselli.com/how-empathy-can-be-sinful>.

⁵⁰This contrast is similar to what Jordan Peterson calls “genuine empathy” (good) and “counterproductive sentimentality” (harmful). Jordan Peterson, “Life at the Bottom | Theodore Dalrymple,” *Jordan B. Peterson Podcast*, Season 4: Episode 23, 20 May 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ET7banSeN0.

⁵¹C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce: A Dream* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 131–32.

In Rigney's interview, he gives some people the impression that he is inclined to disbelieve women who claim to have experienced abuse. That is not what Rigney intended to communicate. Rather, his point is that when someone comes to a pastor with an allegation, for example, the pastor should communicate that he is *for* that person but not necessarily that he is unconditionally committed to taking that person's view on the matter. After Rigney's interview, he wrote seven insightful articles that clarify his intention and advance the discussion.⁵²

3. *Carl Trueman on the Road to Sexual Revolution*⁵³

Carl Trueman is professor of biblical and religious studies at Grove City College in Pennsylvania. In this 425-page academic treatise, Trueman attempts to answer this question:

How has the current highly individualistic, iconoclastic, sexually obsessed, and materialistic mindset come to triumph in the West? Or, to put the question in a more pressing and specific fashion . . . Why does the sentence "I am a woman trapped in a man's body" make sense not simply to those who have sat in poststructuralist and queer-theory seminars but to my neighbors, to people I pass on the street, to coworkers who have no particular political ax to grind and who are blissfully unaware of the rebarbative jargon and arcane concepts of Michel Foucault and his myriad epigones and incomprehensible imitators?⁵⁴

Trueman methodically and dispassionately dissects and traces ideas and influences to show how we got from there to here. He explains the influential ideologies of Rousseau, Wordsworth,

"It's all connected. In our culture people tend to see identity as a matter of psychological and sexual choice."

Shelley, Blake, Nietzsche, Marx, Darwin, and Freud. Then Trueman shows how the revolution has triumphed with eroticism in art and pop culture; with expressive individualism in law, ethics, and education; and with transgenderism in the politics of the sexual revolution. It's all connected. In our culture people tend to see identity as a matter of psychological and sexual choice.⁵⁵

4. *Kevin DeYoung on the Splintering of Reformed Evangelicalism*⁵⁶

Kevin DeYoung is senior pastor of Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina, and associate professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte.

DeYoung's article "Why Reformed Evangelicalism Has Splintered: Four Approaches to Race, Politics, and Gender" is descriptive, not prescriptive. He is trying to make sense of the splintering we have experienced in conservative, Reformed evangelicalism since about 2016. What happened? DeYoung observes,

It seems to me there are at least four different "teams" at present. Many of the old networks and alliances are falling apart and being re-formed along new lines. These new lines are not doctrinal in the classic sense. Rather, they often capture a cultural mood, a political instinct, or a personal sensibility. You could label each team by what it sees as the central need of the hour, by what it assesses as the most urgent work of the church in this cultural moment. Let's give each group an adjective corresponding to this assessment.

⁵²Joe Rigney, "Killing Them Softly: Compassion That Warms Satan's Heart," *Desiring God*, 24 May 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/killing-them-softly>; Joe Rigney, "The Enticing Sin of Empathy: How Satan Corrupts through Compassion," *Desiring God*, 31 May 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-enticing-sin-of-empathy>; Joe Rigney, "Dangerous Compassion: How to Make Any Love a Demon," *Desiring God*, 18 January 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/dangerous-compassion>; Joe Rigney, "Do You Feel My Pain? Empathy, Sympathy, and Dangerous Virtues," *Desiring God*, 2 May 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-you-feel-my-pain>; Joe Rigney, "Where Do We Disagree? Golden Rule Reading and the Call for Empathy," *Desiring God*, 12 April 2021, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/where-do-we-disagree>; Joe Rigney, "On Empathy, Once More: A Response to Critics (Part 1)," *Medium*, 14 October 2021, <https://medium.com/@joe.rigney/on-empathy-once-more-a-response-to-critics-part-1-ef87b28e5363>; Joe Rigney, "On Empathy, Once More: A Response to Critics (Part 2)," *Medium*, 14 October 2021, <https://medium.com/@joe.rigney/on-empathy-once-more-a-response-to-critics-part-2-d09070e0dbd2>.

⁵³Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020); Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022). *Rise and Triumph* is 425 pages; *Strange New World* abridges the first book to 204 pages. See also reviews of the unabridged book by Neil Shenvi, 11 January 2021, <https://shenviapoletics.com/liquid-souls-a-brief-review-of-truemans-rise-and-triumph-of-the-modern-self/>; Andrew Walker, 18 November 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/rise-triumph-modern-self-carl-trueman/>; and Tim Challies, 18 November 2020, <https://www.challies.com/book-reviews/the-rise-and-triumph-of-the-modern-self/>.

⁵⁴Trueman, *Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 36.

⁵⁵Cf. Carl R. Trueman, "Evangelicals and Race Theory," *First Things*, February 2021, <https://www.firstthings.com/articale/2021/02/evangelicals-and-race-theory>; Carl R. Trueman, "How Expressive Individualism Threatens Civil Society," *Background* 3615 (2021): 1–14. See also the *9Marks Journal* for March 2022 on "Expressive Individualism in the Church" — an issue devoted to showing how Trueman's *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* is so helpful and relevant for pastors and churches (<https://www.9marks.org/journal/expressive-individualism-in-the-church/>).

⁵⁶Kevin DeYoung, "Why Reformed Evangelicalism Has Splintered: Four Approaches to Race, Politics, and Gender," *The Gospel Coalition*, 9 March 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/why-reformed-evangelicalism-has-splintered-four-approaches-to-race-politics-and-gender/>.



1. Contrite: “Look at the church’s complicity in past and present evils. We have been blind to injustice, prejudice, racism, sexism, and abuse. What the world needs is to see a church owning its sins and working, in brokenness, to make up for them and overcome them.”

2. Compassionate: “Look at the many people hurting and grieving in our midst and in the world. Now is the time to listen and learn. Now is the time to weep with those who weep. What the world needs is a church that demonstrates the love of Christ.”

3. Careful: “Look at the moral confusion and intellectual carelessness that marks our time. Let’s pay attention to our language and our definitions. What the world needs is a church that will draw upon the best of its theological tradition and lead the way in understanding the challenges of our day.”

4. Courageous: “Look at the church’s compromise with (if not outright capitulation to) the spirit of the age. Now is the time for a trumpet blast, not for backing down. What the world needs is a church that will admonish the wayward, warn against danger, and stand as a bulwark for truth, no matter how unpopular.”

DeYoung is trying to present each view in a positive light and in a way that adherents of each view would agree to. Here’s how he maps out those four views on a series of contemporary issues:⁵⁷

⁵⁷It is remarkable how so many seemingly unrelated issues line up on this scale. It reminds me of Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic, 2007). See Justin Taylor’s excerpts and summary: “A Conflict of Visions: or, Why Can’t We All Get Along?,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 9 February 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/a-conflict-of-visions-or-why-cant-we-all-get-along/>.

Table 1. Race

	White Supremacy	Systemic Racism	Police Shootings	Critical Race Theory	Black Lives Matter
1. Contrite	Essential to American history, Whites must repent	Rampant— disparities imply discrimination	Evidence of continuing racism and injustice	Full of good insights	Say it, wave it, wear it
2. Compassionate	More prevalent than we think, Whites should lament	Not the only explanation, but should be seen and called out	First step is to weep with those who weep	Chew on the meat, spit out the bones	Support the slogan, not the organization
3. Careful	A sad part of American history but not the whole story, we should all celebrate what is good and reject what is bad	Open to the category, but racial disparities exist for many reasons	Let’s get the evidence first before jumping on social media	Core concepts are deeply at odds with Christian conviction, but let’s not throw around labels willy-nilly	Black lives are made in the image of God, but given the aims of the larger movement, using the phrase in an unqualified way is unwise
4. Courageous	Sadly, a part of our past, but lumping all Whites together as racists is anti-gospel	A Marxist category we must reject	The real problem is Black-on-Black crime	The church’s path toward liberalism	What about Blue lives? Unborn lives? All lives?

Table 2. Politics and Gender

	Trump	Christian Nationalism	Wearing Masks	Sexual Abuse	Gender Roles
1. Contrite	No! The church’s allegiance to Trump is the clearest sign of its spiritual bankruptcy.	One of the biggest problems in our day, a dangerous ideology at home in most conservative white churches	I feel unsafe and uncared for when masks aren’t worn—besides Covid affects minority communities worse than others	It’s about time the church owned this scandal, believes victims, and calls out perpetrators and their friends	The problem is toxic masculinity and unbiblical stereotypes
2. Compassionate	A matter of Christian liberty, but there are good reasons to criticize Trump	Too many Christians are letting their politics shape their religion	It’s one small but important way to love your neighbor	Sympathize with victims, vow to do better	Traditional views are good, but many dangers come from our own mistakes
3. Careful	A matter of Christian liberty, but there are good reasons someone might have voted for Trump	Christian symbols and rhetoric supporting insurrection is bad, but the term itself needs more definition.	Probably overblown and a bit frustrating, but let’s just get through this	Each case and each accusation should be looked at on its own merits	We need a strong, joyful celebration of biblical manhood and womanhood
4. Courageous	Yes! He’s not perfect, but he stood up to the anti-God agenda of the left.	A new label meant to smear Christians who want to see our country adhere to biblical principles	A sign of the government encroaching on our liberties	A real tragedy, but so is demonizing good people	The problem is feminism and emasculated men

Doug Wilson calls DeYoung's article a "fine descriptive piece."⁵⁸ (I agree.) Wilson agrees with all of it, except for these two sentences by DeYoung:

The loudest voices tend to be 1s and 4s, which makes sense because they tend to see many of these issues in the starkest terms and often collide with each other in ways that makes a lot of online noise. The 1s and 4s can also be the most separatist, with some voices (among the 1s) encouraging an exodus from white evangelical spaces and some voices (among the 4s) encouraging the woke to be excommunicated.

DeYoung is a 3, and Wilson is a 4. Wilson thinks that 3s can be separatists by not associating with 4s in order to win the approval of 1s and 2s. I think DeYoung is correct that in general 1s and 4s are loudest and most separatist, and I also agree with Wilson that *any* of those positions can be separatist; in other words, being a 1 or a 4 does not necessarily make one inherently more separatist than the others.

For example, some 3s are vigilant not to recommend resources by 4s or associate with 4s (e.g., by intentionally not speaking together at conferences) while simultaneously recommending resources by 1s and 2s and closely associating with 1s and 2s. I think that reflects a common tendency to "punch right and coddle left"—to care more about what people to your left think about you and to label anyone to your right as a "fundamentalist."⁵⁹ (I don't mean to pick on the 3s. In DeYoung's taxonomy, I'm about a 3 myself! But I'm more sympathetic to 4s than 1s and 2s.)

Speaking of fundamentalism, it is ironic that many left-leaning people who despise fundamentalism participate in cancel culture more zealously than fundamentalists practice second-degree separation. John Woodbridge explains what second-degree separation is:

⁵⁸Douglas Wilson, "Kevin DeYoung and the Taxonomy of Conflict," *Blog and Mablog*, 21 June 2021, <https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/kevin-deyoung-and-the-taxonomy-of-conflict.html>.

⁵⁹On fundamentalism, cf. Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen, eds., *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011). Here is one of my conclusions: "Few people consider themselves extreme. People commonly frame issues in a reductionistic way slanted in favor of their argument: (1) there are twits on the left and (2) wackos on the right, but (3) unlike those extremes, there's my reasonable middle way. Lyrics from a 1973 Stealers Wheel song come to mind: 'Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right, here I am, stuck in the middle with you.' And when defending your view on the spectrum of evangelicalism, there will always be someone to both the left and right of you." Andrew David Naselli, "Conclusion," in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 215.



Second-degree separation means that if you find someone whom you think is theologically or ethically compromised, you must separate from that person [e.g., don't have Christian partnership with a theological liberal], as well as from other people who have not separated from the first individual [e.g., Billy Graham]. These post-1957 fundamentalists separated from evangelical Christians who accepted the principle of cooperative evangelism [particularly Billy Graham's method of platforming Roman Catholics and theological liberals in his evangelistic meetings and then giving those leaders information cards filled out by converts], which vexed fundamentalists.⁶⁰

Cancel culture today is worse than hyper-fundamentalism.⁶¹

5. Jonathan Leeman on Authority and Deconstruction⁶²

Jonathan Leeman is an elder of Cheverly Baptist Church in suburban Washington, D.C. and editorial director for 9Marks.

It has become increasingly common for people to have this mindset toward authorities: "If you are in a position of power and if you disagree with me in a way I don't like, then you are

⁶⁰John D. Woodbridge, "The 'Fundamentalist' Label: An Interview with John Woodbridge," *Trinity Magazine* (2009): 9. PDF at https://andynaselli.com/wp-content/uploads/2009_fundamentalist_label.pdf.

⁶¹On hyper-fundamentalism, see Kevin T. Bauder, "Fundamentalism," in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 43–45.

⁶²Jonathan Leeman, *Don't Fire Your Church Members: The Case for Congregationalism* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 131–52; Jonathan Leeman, "The Blessing of (Good) Authority: Lessons from a King's Final Words (2 Sam. 23:3–4)," *The Gospel Coalition*, 27 September 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/king-david-final-words-godly-authority-2-samuel-23/>; Jonathan Leeman, "Defending Sound Doctrine against the Deconstruction of American Evangelicalism," *9Marks Journal* (2021): 7–33; Jonathan Leeman, "An Ecclesiological Take on 'The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill,'" *9Marks*, 14 March 2022, <https://www.9marks.org/article/an-ecclesiological-take-on-the-rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/>. This work is culminating in a forthcoming book: Jonathan Leeman, *Authority: How Good Leadership Protects the Vulnerable, Makes Society Flourish, and Saves the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, forthcoming in 2023).

abusive and domineering.” Consequently, others are rightly concerned that “abuse is becoming a totalizing category and that even the accusation of abuse takes down everyone and everything in its path.”⁶³

Leeman argues that God designed authority as a gift to bless others (see 2 Sam 23:3–4). But sinners can misuse authority in a way that does not bless but destroys (e.g., Pharaoh oppressed the Israelites). Authority itself is not sinful. But it is dangerous when sinners misuse it.

“Anti-authority sentiments are in the cultural air, and some professing Christians are taking it to another level by deconstructing Christianity”

Leeman distinguishes between the “authority to command” and the “authority of counsel.”⁶⁴ The *authority to command* is the right to enforce what you say, and the *authority of counsel* does not have that right but must rely on the persuasive power of the truth. Those who have the authority to command include parents (disciplining young children with the rod), the government (punishing lawbreakers, including executing with the sword), and the whole church (excommunicating by using the keys of the kingdom). The relationship between pastors and other church members is not like a parent and young children but more like a parent with *adult* children. Pastors do not have the authority to command but the authority of counsel by shepherding (which includes preaching and teaching).

Anti-authority sentiments are in the cultural air, and some professing Christians are taking it to another level by deconstructing Christianity.⁶⁵ Leeman highlights three books (among others):⁶⁶

[1] *Jesus and John Wayne*, by Kristen Kobes Du Mez, argues that white evangelicalism is characterized by patriarchy, toxic masculinity, authoritarianism, nationalism, anti-gay sentiment, Islamophobia and indifference to Black people’s lives and rights.⁶⁷

[2] *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*, by Beth Allison Barr, argues that the teaching of female subordination is a historical construct rather than the “clear biblical teaching” her opponents claim that it is.⁶⁸

[3] *The Color of Compromise*, by Jemar Tisby, traces the long history of how white racism and evangelical Christianity have been fully intertwined in U.S. history, and how every effort to challenge white supremacy has been opposed—*theologically, politically, morally*—by white evangelicals.⁶⁹

The critiques that these books offer are not exegetical and theological, but historical, sociological, personal, and emotional. Leeman warns against making your story more authoritative than the Bible.⁷⁰

⁶⁷For reviews, see Neil Shenvi, “Cowboy Christianity: A Short Review of Du Mez’s *Jesus and John Wayne*,” *Shenvi Apologetics* (March 15, 2021), <https://shenviapologetics.com/cowboy-christianity-a-short-review-of-du-mezs-jesus-and-john-wayne/>; Anne Kennedy “Jesus and John Wayne: A Fair Portrait of Evangelicalism?” *CBMW.org* (April 5, 2021), <https://cbmw.org/2021/04/05/jesus-and-john-wayne-a-fair-portrait-of-evangelicalism/>; Stephen Wolfe, “Upper-Class Christianity,” *First Things* (August 2021), <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/08/upper-class-christianity>; John D. Wisley, “Jesus and John Wayne: A Review,” *Ad Fontes Journal* (February 9, 2022), <https://adfontesjournal.com/book-review/jesus-and-john-wayne-a-review/>; and Michael Young, “Jesus and John Wayne Among the Deplorables,” *American Reformer* (March 11, 2022), <https://americanreformer.org/jesus-and-john-wayne-among-the-deplorables>. See also Denny Burk, “Crucial Questions with Kristin Kobes Du Mez,” *DennyBurk.com* (November 29, 2021), <https://www.dennyburk.com/crucial-questions-with-kristin-kobes-du-mez>.

⁶⁸For reviews, see Kevin DeYoung, “The Making of Biblical Womanhood: A Review” *The Gospel Coalition* (July 2021), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelos/article/the-making-of-biblical-womanhood-a-review/>; Neil Shenvi, “Unmaking the Patriarchy: A Brief Review of Barr’s *Making of Biblical Womanhood*” *Shenvi Apologetics* (November 9, 2021), <https://shenviapologetics.com/unmaking-the-patriarchy-a-brief-review-of-barrs-making-of-biblical-womanhood/>; Timothy E. Miller, “The Making of Biblical Womanhood” *JBTW* 2/1 (Fall 2021), https://seminary.bju.edu/files/2021/11/JBTW2.1_Article05_TheMakingofBiblicalWomanhood_Miller.pdf; and Jordan Steffaniak, “The Making of Biblical Womanhood,” *The London Lyceum* (December 20, 2021), <https://www.thelondonlyceum.com/book-review-the-making-of-biblical-womanhood/> (20 December 2021).

⁶⁹For reviews, see Samuel Sey, “The Color of Compromise,” *Slow to Write* (January 22, 2019), <https://slowtowrite.com/the-color-of-compromise/>; Daniel K. Williams, “The Color of Compromise,” *The Gospel Coalition* (January 23, 2019), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/color-compromise/>; S. Donald Fortson III, “The Color of Incomplete History,” *Reformed Faith & Practice: The Journal of Reformed Theological Seminary* 4/1 (May 2019), <https://journal.rts.edu/article/the-color-of-incomplete-history/>; Neil Shenvi, “Compromised? A Long Review of Tisby’s *Color of Compromise*,” *Shenvi Apologetics* (December 4, 2019), <https://shenviapologetics.com/compromised-a-long-review-of-tisbys-color-of-compromise>.

⁷⁰Similarly, we must beware of giving our own opinions unwarranted authority. Trevin Wax recounts, “Not long ago, I sat down with a professor I’ve long admired, a man who has trained future pastors and church leaders for decades. Curious to get his take on culture shifts and the next generation, I asked him how an incoming class of 20-somethings today differed from 15 or 20 years ago. What’s the difference between older millennials preparing for ministry (my generation) and Gen Z? I asked him. He paused for a moment and then offered three general impressions. *Pornography, gender confusion, and the weight given to one’s opinion.* . . . The third difference is one I attribute to the rise and influence of social media. Many young people today have grown up in an environment where broadcasting their opinions is expected. Any one person’s opinion carries as much weight or validity as another’s. The classroom gets interesting when so many students enter the room already convinced their assumptions regarding theology, preaching, ministry practice, and the like are correct, chafing against the expectation they’d accept an expert’s authority, no matter how time-tested or experienced the person in authority might be. Yes, everyone is entitled to an opinion, but social media has distorted the weight we assign these viewpoints so that nearly everyone assumes their perspective is just as valid as someone else’s. This is a sign of the ‘death of expertise.’” Trevin Wax, “Gen Z Enters the Ministry: 3 Big Challenges,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 10 March 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/gen-z-ministry-challenges/>.

⁶³Kevin DeYoung, “Toward a Better Discussion about Abuse,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 24 January 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/toward-a-better-discussion-about-abuse/>.

⁶⁴Leeman, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members*, 138, 140. See also the fourth lesson in Leeman, “An Ecclesiological Take on ‘The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill’”

⁶⁵See also Neil Shenvi, “Sociology as Theology: The Deconstruction of Power in (Post)Evangelical Scholarship,” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 3.2 (2021): 46–51; Alisa Childers, “Why We Should Not Redeem ‘Deconstruction,’” *The Gospel Coalition*, 18 February 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/redeem-reconstruction/>.

⁶⁶Leeman, “Defending Sound Doctrine,” 9.

CONCLUSION

These ten resources (five by non-Christians and five by Christians) have helped me make sense of our current culture and make sense of how Christians are responding to it—particularly churches and Christian schools and other institutions in conservative evangelicalism.

“You don’t need to be an expert in every new shade of doctrinal deviation, but you should be able to discern what is false if you know and love what is true.”

More importantly, these resources have helped me in this complicated world to be discerning as I endeavor to hate what is evil and to love what is good. God describes “the mature” as “those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:14). Maturing in our “powers of discernment” requires training. By God’s grace I want to be discerning so that I can better obey these commands from God:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good” (Rom 12:9).

“Do not love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15a).⁷¹

One final note: As helpful as the above resources are, I don’t want to imply that you need to read them (and others like them) to be a faithful Christian. The most helpful resource by far is the Bible.



There is nothing new under the sun. You need to be saturated with the Bible for other resources to be helpful. You don’t need to be an expert in every new shade of doctrinal deviation, but you should be able to discern what is false if you know and love what is true. The Bible must be your bedrock underneath all other resources, the lens through which you view reality and put this complicated world in focus, the truth that identifies falsehood.

The Bible is the only book that is God-breathed, entirely true, our final authority, sufficient, necessary, and powerful. It’s the only “must read” book. It’s a book that we must believe, love, submit to and obey, be grateful for, read humbly, read carefully and prayerfully, and read routinely.⁷² ✕

⁷¹Cf. Naselli, “Do Not Love the World.”

⁷²Cf. Andrew David Naselli, “What Is the Bible, and How Should We Treat It?” a sermon preached to Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mounds View, MN, January 10, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/499637314>.

Pastoral Fatherhood: Understanding the Pastor as a Paternal Example

¹This is not to argue that the magisterial domains of church and home *only* overlap in the pastor. One may also consider the ways in which the church and home overlap in church members broadly, parents and children, husbands and wives, doctrinal catechesis, etc. Nevertheless, this essay submits that a proper pastoral theology serves as a compass for these other areas of focus. For a broader look at the *familial* nature of the church and various ways in which the church and home overlap, see the following: Vern Sheridan Poythress, “The Church as Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in the Church,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, Revised. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 307–328; David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles*, SBL Dissertation Series (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983); Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder, eds., *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010); Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “Οἶκος Θεού: A Theologically Neglected but Important Ecclesiological Metaphor,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 2.1 (Fall 2003), 53–65.

INTRODUCTION

In 1999, evolutionary paleontologist and Harvard University professor Dr. Stephen Jay Gould coined the phrase “non-overlapping magisteria” to describe the relationship between science and religion. He aimed to show that science and religion are miles apart because they deal with different realms or, “domains of magisterial (teaching) authority.” This article will not debate Gould’s thesis, but will use his taxonomy of magisterial domains as an analogy. The *home* and the *church* are two primary domains of *spiritual teaching authority* in the Scriptures. As such, one must ask, “Do these magisteria overlap? And if so, how?” The definitive answer of this essay, of complementarian theology, and of the Bible, is “absolutely.”

This essay will argue that the magisterial domains of the church and home overlap uniquely in the pastoral office, such that a pastor functions as a paternal example for the people of God.¹ To make this argument, key biblical texts will be explored that depict the pastor in paternal terms, with one “problem text” discussed along the way. After surveying the biblical data, a theological sketch will be given to underpin an evangelical understanding of pastoral fatherhood in the church family. Finally, the practical impact of pastoral fatherhood will be discussed, demonstrating both the positive and negative implications.²

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Throughout the Old Testament, various leaders are given for God’s people. Prophets, priests, kings, sages, and community elders all exercise authoritative roles in the history of Israel, and each of these ministries are depicted in *fatherly terms*.³ These paternal patterns in the OT then develop into a motif in the New Testament. Jesus Christ comes as the *Son* from the *Father*. His apostolic disciples, on whose testimony the church is built, are twelve *men*. These men plant churches, who appoint *male elders* to exercise oversight. But, perhaps the most vivid *ecclesial* representations of this motif are found in Paul’s ministry and teachings.

First, Paul regularly describes himself as father to individuals — to Timothy (1 Cor 4:7, Phil 2:22, 1 Tim 1:2, 2 Tim 1:2), to Titus (Titus 1:4), and to Onesimus (Philem 12).⁴ Lest one surmise this is only an individual-to-individual phenomenon, Paul also describes himself as a father figure to entire churches (1 Cor 4:14–17 and 1 Thess 2:7–12 are the most direct references).⁵ This last reference is of particular import because, in this instance, we see that it is not only an apostolic ministry of Paul’s; co-writers Silvanus and Timothy are also included in the collective “we” who related to the Thessalonian church as parents to children. Thus, in the apostolic ministry of Paul and the delegated ministry of his followers, parenthood was a regular metaphor for church leadership.

Second, this example from Paul is only deepened with his teachings on pastoral ministry in the Pastoral Epistles, specifically in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. One of the key qualifications for a pastor is that he “manage his household well . . .for [if not] . . . how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim 3:4–5). This sentiment is repeated in Titus 1, where the children of overseers are not to be insubordinate (Titus

²This article serves as a distillation of my doctoral dissertation. Camden Pulliam, “Paternal Pastors: An Evangelical Approach” (Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020).

³For prophets, see 2 Kgs 2:12; 13:14; for priests, see Exod 12:1–28 or Jdg 17:10; 18:19; for kings, see Deut 17:14–20 and the similarities with parental responsibilities in Deut 6:1–9; for sages, see Prov 1:1; 4:1; for elders, see Num 11:1–30, in addition to the inherent nature of community eldership. For a fuller treatment of each OT ministry, see Pulliam, “Paternal Pastors,” 44–70.

⁴Peter also describes himself as a father to Mark (1 Pet. 5:13).

⁵See also 1 Cor 3:1–3; Gal 4:18–19; 1 John 2–4; 2 John 1, 4, 13; 3 John 4; 2 Cor 6:11–12, 12:14–15. More could also be said about 1 Thess 2, since Paul and his apostolic delegation are depicted in both paternal (vs. 11–12) and maternal terms (vs. 7). It cannot be missed, however, that both parental metaphors are assigned to *men*. Some may view this text as a challenge to complementarian theology. In this author’s perspective, it instead bolsters the belief that male pastors (or in Paul’s case, the apostle and his delegates) serve as parental — not merely paternal — examples.



1:6). The logic of these qualifications is straightforward: If a man cannot parent at home, he cannot “parent” at church. The work is similar in both magisterial domains.⁶ By linking the pastor’s qualification for church office to his parenthood in the home, Paul overlaps the magisterial domains of the church and home directly in the office of the pastor.

How does this relate to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 23:9, “Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven?”

Various interpretations of Matthew 23:9 have been suggested. The verse could be taken as a direct and wooden prohibition, wherein Jesus’ disciples should not treat any other man as a father, period. The problem with this interpretation is the Bible’s blessing elsewhere of natural fatherhood. Jesus’ other teachings in texts like Luke 11:11–13, where Jesus recognizes natural father-child relationships, give a common-sense rebuttal to this wooden and literal interpretation. Some commentators argue instead that Matthew 23:9 is hyperbolic. Jesus does not, in fact, prohibit the language of fatherhood categorically, but he means to caution against the spiritual elevation of human figures to divine-like status.

⁶ How a pastor addresses an adult congregant is quite different than how he would address a toddler in the home. Yet, the underlying parental will and work of each is the same, even if the way they are expressed is different. A pastor’s desire for his congregants should be no less than those for his children, and his work to present them blameless before the judgment throne should be no less taxing than the toil at home.

Some perceive this view to accommodate Roman Catholic practice, wherein priests are regarded as “fathers” and the Pope is appointed Father of the Church.⁷ Another interpretive option suggests that Jesus restricts *spiritual fatherhood* but not natural fatherhood. In other words, what Jesus means is to say is something like, “Call no man your *spiritual* father on earth, for you have one *spiritual* Father, who is in heaven.” This interpretation aligns well with the context, which cautions against spiritual elitism, and it seems to be the dominant position for many evangelical interpreters.⁸ But for those who prefer this view, we are still left with what to do about Paul’s paternal emphasis for the pastorate. On this issue, many evangelicals have no theologically grounded answer.

THEOLOGICAL SKETCH

Throughout the Pastoral Epistles, Paul uses the metaphor of household stewardship to describe the pastoral office.⁹

⁷ See Pablo Gadenz, “The Priest as Spiritual Father,” in *Catholic for a Reason: Scripture and the Mystery of the Family of God*, ed. Scott Hahn and Leon J. Suprenant (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 1998), 216. The hypocrisy of this Catholic interpretation and practice should not be lost on evangelicals. Even if Jesus’ teaching is hyperbolic, it is difficult to imagine a worse violation of the *spirit of the text* than the elevated authority and status of the Pope, the Vicar of Christ. For, Catholic doctrine states the Pope has “full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 882.

⁸ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr, *Matthew 19–28*, 3 vols., International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 3:277; David W. Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry: Biblical Images for Leaders and Followers*, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 83; R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: Eerdmans, 1985), 328–29; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 577; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 927–28; John Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait: Five New Testament Word Studies* (Eerdmans, 1961), 82–83.

This is most obvious in Titus 1:7, where the pastor is described as an “overseer” and “God’s steward.” But this emphasis is seen in numerous other places as well. Paul is “entrusted” with the gospel of the glory of God (1 Tim 1:11). The gospel is a “good deposit” worthy to be “guarded” (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14). The church is the “household of God” (1 Tim 3:15). And directly pertaining to pastoral qualifications, in 1 Timothy 3:4–5 a pastor is described as “managing” his home and “caring” for the church.¹⁰ The language behind each of these verses stems from Greco-Roman household stewardship. The Pauline picture of the church presents a Greco-Roman household where the *paterfamilias* is away from the homestead, and a “household steward” stands in oversight of his affairs until he returns.¹¹ In this metaphor, God is the *paterfamilias*, the church is the entire household, and the pastor is the household steward who stands and acts in the Father’s place. In this office, the pastor is a steward who will give an account for his guidance over the household in physical protection, spiritual guidance, relational trust, emotional care, and even financial guardianship.¹²

This Greco-Roman backdrop creates a theological category for an evangelical understanding of pastoral fatherhood. Is a pastor the father of the church family? No. God alone is Father (Matt 23:9). But is a pastor fatherly? Yes. He stands in the place of the Father, acting as his representative. Within this theological perspective, Matthew 23:9 would allow for spiritual father figures, but these figures should never supplant the Father himself.

This evangelical sketch positions the pastor as a father figure for the church family, with delegated authority to give fatherly provision (“feed my sheep,” John 21:17), protection (“guard the good deposit,” 1 Tim 6:20),

“Indeed, healthy families blossom in the culture of a healthy church, and a healthy church blossoms under healthy church fathers”

⁹ For a more extensive analysis of stewardship language in the Pastoral Epistles, see F. Alan Tomlinson, “The Purpose and Stewardship Theme in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 52–83.

¹⁰ See Abraham J. Malherbe, “Overseers as Household Managers in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Text, Image, and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World: A Festschrift in Honor of David Lee Balch*, ed. Aliou Cissé Niang and Carolyn Osiek (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 78.

¹¹ Tomlinson, “The Purpose and Stewardship Theme within the Pastoral Epistles,” 69–70.

¹² The “representative” pastoral fatherhood described here must be distinguished from “ontological” fatherhood, as described by the Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Catechism states that a priest, upon ordination, is conferred an “indelible spiritual character” and becomes an *icon* of the Father as a representative of Christ. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1582. While the Catechism also affirms a form of representation and instrumentality (1581), the priest’s ontological change of character is an essential distinction. The representative fatherhood presented in this essay maintains that an ordained pastor serves as a father-figure instrumentally, but he is not changed ontologically.

leadership (“set the believers an example,” 1 Tim. 4:12), and love (“Pursue . . . love, steadfastness, gentleness,” 1 Tim 6:11). Such fatherly stewardship means that the pastor stands in a unique position between the home and church. His office inhabits the intersection of two overlapping magisteria. His pastorate is dependent on the quality of his home, and the church is dependent on the quality of his pastorate.¹³

PRACTICAL IMPACT

The practical benefits of pastoral fatherhood are impossible to quantify. But for the purpose of this article, one essential benefit should be mentioned. Pastors should be model parents.¹⁴ Their service in the home should be commendable, and their service in the church should be godly, for they are meant to represent God. Natural fathers should be able to watch a pastor with his children and follow his example. Parents should also be able to watch a pastor’s care for the flock and model his pastoring.

Churches should ask of their pastoral candidates, “Do we want our parents to look like him?” “Do we want to treat our children the way he treats us?” “Does he treat church members the way God treats us?” These are sobering questions for pastoral candidates, but they are less sobering than the consequences of unfaithfulness.

Indeed, the consequences of unfaithfulness are devastating. Just as good fathers have an incalculable impact on the health and wellbeing of their children, so also the impact bad fathers have is disastrous. A church with healthy and godly pastoral fathers will soon have a whole and healthy church family. A church with unhealthy and ungodly pastoral fathers will soon have a broken and unhealthy church family. Just because a pastor executes his office

poorly does not mean he is not a father-figure. He is a father-figure, and he brings consequential impact with him. The question is not if a pastor will father his church, but how?

The practical significance of pastoral fathers should be clear. Pastors must be men of the highest character. If they are to lead the church, they must be “family men,” able to “set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12).

CONCLUSION

The domains of the church and home overlap uniquely in the pastoral office, such that a pastor functions as a paternal example for the people of God. When the OT themes of fatherly leadership are sustained through Paul’s emphasis on pastoral fatherhood (yet cautioned with Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 23), it becomes clear that the pastor is a representative father figure in the church family. As such, he demonstrates for God’s people what parenthood ought to be, both in his home and in the church. Indeed, the magisterial domains of home and church overlap in this one office.

Accordingly, there is both delight and danger. As parents steer the course of the home, so pastors steer the course of the church, for good or for ill. Indeed, healthy families blossom in the culture of a healthy church, and a healthy church blossoms under healthy church fathers. May God the Father grant more pastoral father figures to represent him well, for his glory and the good of our families and churches.



¹³ Pastoral paternity should not eliminate the possibility of an unmarried pastor. But the assumed norm of the biblical text is a married pastor. See R. Albert Mohler, “Must a Pastor Be Married? The New York Times Asks the Question,” *Albert Mohler*, March 25, 2011, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://albertmohler.com/2011/03/25/must-a-pastor-be-married-the-new-york-times-asks-the-question/>.

¹⁴ The variegated ways that the Bible uses family imagery cannot be explored here. Let it be stated, though, that the pastor is not the *only* parental example in the church. Of course, women should learn how to mother from other women, and men should learn how to father from older men in the church (Titus 2:1–8). What’s more, pastors should also learn from their congregants, treating older women as mothers and older men as fathers (1 Tim 5:1–2). The Bible’s economy of parental help is vast and complex, for the task of parenting is very vast, and very complex. Nonetheless, the pastor is the primary model of God’s parenthood for his people.

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