

Something Critical Theory Can Never Offer You

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Approximately ten years ago, my wife and I were visiting a member of our church family. This particular member has since gone to be with the Lord, but his words are still fixed in my mind. As my wife and I were sitting in his living room, he proceeded to let us know his belief about the cursed children of Ham. This belief led him to a conviction about a particular race of people and their role in society. While I had heard this kind of heretical application before, I am certain that my wife was shocked. The doctrine that this dear man had been taught was one which would justify social disparity in a culture – a justification that was based on the Bible.

I tell you this story to call you to humility so that we might learn the truth. We should not take for granted that a series like this is only for a new generation of believers. Rather, a series like this is also helpful for older believers who may have been misled by errant teachings or applications of the scriptures.

As Christians, we are not only students of the Word of God, but we are also students of the culture around us. The changes in culture seem to have accelerated with the propagation of what has been called Critical Theory.

Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay wrote a book entitled *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity* in which the authors trace the development of Postmodernism to Postmodernism Applied. About Postmodernism, they admit that it is hard to define, but they characterize it by two principles: a knowledge principle and a political principle. The knowledge principle (31) is probably what we are most familiar with: “Radical skepticism about whether objective knowledge or truth is obtainable and a commitment to cultural constructivism.”¹

If Postmodernism says that objective truth is not obtainable, then what is Critical Theory. For this, Pluckrose and Lindsay are helpful:

¹ Pluckrose & Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, 31.

Theory refers to a specific set of beliefs, which posit that the world and our ability to gather knowledge about it work in accordance with the postmodern knowledge and postmodern political principle...[in addition] it [Theory] **assumes that objective reality cannot be known, truth is socially constructed through language**...therefore Theory aims to critically examine discourses [ways of talking]. (46-47)

Though there are elements of truth within Critical Theory, Theory intentionally creates instability about known reality. Critical Theory is designed to cause uncertainty in order to change what is perceived to be a problem, be it gender binaries, colonialism, feminism... etc.

So, as we live in a culture that is increasingly swimming in this kind of worldview, and as we are trying to engage people who are regularly observing injustices, riots, economic depression...the furthest thing from our mind is complete joy. We just want to get back to a sense of normalcy. When what we thought was certain is no longer a certainty, how do we even respond?

This is why the letter of I John is so helpful. Though there were some teachers who had separated from the body of Christians, their teaching had created some uncertainty about Jesus Christ among the believers. So John sets out to give certainty by establishing and reaffirming truths that bring joyful assurance. The Critical Theory worldview cannot offer you an unchanging source for joy, but the Bible can.

Listen to John's own reasons for writing:

1 John 1:4 KJV 1900

⁴ And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

1 John 2:1 KJV 1900

¹ My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

1 John 2:26 KJV 1900

²⁶ These *things* have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

1 John 5:13 KJV 1900

¹³ These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

John wants to give absolute truths that bring joyful assurance, but I don't want you to overlook the formula that he uses to introduce these statements: he has **written**.

- How can the message of John bring joyful assurance?
- How can we love our families in such a way that there is joyful certainty?
- How can we shepherd our wives and children in such a way that there is absolute, joyful certainty in the midst of narratives which are designed to create uncertainty?

The written, preserved testimony of Jesus must be our stable source for fullness of joy.

- › Kids' Pause: How can I believe in Someone that I cannot see? The written word of God tells us about Him.

Listen to the written testimony of the witness:

1 John 1:1-4 KJV 1900

¹ THAT which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; ² (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) ³ That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

Critical Theory does not offer the same object

He begins with the object being witnessed - *That which was from the beginning*. Immediately, John's testimony connects with other portions of scripture that begin in similar ways:

John 1:1 KJV 1900

¹ IN the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Genesis 1:1 KJV 1900

¹ IN the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

What John is a witness of is eternally significant. One of the wonders of the inscripturated testimony is that it challenges temporal perspectives. Have you considered your life in light of eternity?

Critical theory does not offer an eternal, unchanging God. It is constantly changing definitions, terminology, and applications. Here, John calls us to consider changes all around us by looking to the unchanging One. Joyful assurance does not begin with figuring out modern narratives. Joyful assurance begins with the eternal Lord.

- › Kids' Pause: Being sure that Jesus is real begins with Who Jesus is. Jesus is the eternal God.

Critical Theory does not offer the same witness

Apostolic Witness and Authority

1 John 1:1 KJV 1900

¹ THAT which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

John uses terminology that confirms he is an eye, ear, and hand witness. John roots what he is saying in his apostolic authority. Today, we may not use the term “witness.” We may use the term “experience.” There is a problem here though. None of us have experienced this Person like John is describing, so how is this kind of experience possible? The answer is “in the scriptures.” Wright in his book *The Mission of God's People* comments on this very passage:

Well, we might think, this was clearly important to those first gospel missionaries of Jesus Christ. They could stand up and say, “We were there. We knew him. We saw him die. We saw him raised to life by God. We are witnesses of these things.” But we can't say that. So what relevance has this point got to the mission of God's people today? **It is vitally important, for where did all that eyewitness testimony about Jesus**

end up? In the Bible, of course! In the New Testament documents that trace their origin and their authenticity back to those first eyewitnesses.²

Joyful assurance is found in the testimony which has been written in the Bible.

Doctrine of Inerrancy

It would be wise to be unflinching in the “Doctrine of Inerrancy” that “all the words of Scripture in the original manuscripts do not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. The Bible always tells the truth...concerning everything that it talks about...”³ (Grudem)

But why are so many people who know the Bible lacking in joy? When we were children, my brother and I were not much of cereal people, but we did enjoy digging our hands into a box of cereal in search for a prize. We made sure that each piece of cereal had our germs on it, while we looked for what mattered most – the treasure at the bottom!

What John does here is establishes the written testimony about the PRIZE — Jesus (Luke 24:44-49). You see, it is possible to read the Bible, memorize parts of the Bible, and hear preaching from the Bible, all the while missing the Prize. Jesus is the Treasure. He is the Prize. It matters not only that you read the Bible but how you read the Bible. John is intent on showing forth Jesus.

1 John 1:2 KJV 1900

² (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

John further emphasizes this witness testimony. Why? Later in the letter, he will address the particular heresy that had caused this kind of uncertainty — a teaching that Jesus did not come in the flesh, that he only appeared to be in the flesh. Hence, he wants his readers to know with certainty that this Divine Person came bodily. We mustn't overlook all that is wrapped up in the term “witness” (1:2). Being a witness of this testimony is only possible through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

² Wright, Christopher J. H.. *The Mission of God's People (Biblical Theology for Life)* (pp. 223-224). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

³ Grudem, W. A. (2004). *Systematic theology: an introduction to biblical doctrine* (p. 90). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House.

Luke is especially helpful in reminding us how:

- Jesus is the anointed One, of whom the scriptures speak.
- Jesus promised his followers they would be witnesses empowered from on high.
- This promise was fulfilled 10 days after Jesus' ascension.

In other words, without the righteous life, substitutionary death, victorious Resurrection, and glorious ascension of Jesus, being a witness would not have been even possible — and John is claiming to bear this witness.

This is tremendously comforting and helpful. The fact that God became human means that he can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He is the suitable Substitute being fully God and fully man. The certainty of this theology is absolutely crucial. But there is more, he saves and equips his followers for ongoing witness. Joyful assurance is found in the certainty of God having become fully human.

› **Kids' Pause: John is an eye witness, ear witness, and hand witness.**

Critical Theory cannot offer the same result of this witness

1 John 1:3 KJV 1900

³ That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

John announces all of this, the reality of Jesus and his witness, so that they would enjoy fellowship with each other — a fellowship that is really with God in Christ. Fellowship in biblical Christianity is centered on the truth of the Person of Jesus Christ. It is not this way in our world.

Intersectionality is a concept within Critical Race Theory (one type of Critical Theory), and it seeks to establish a grid by which to determine those most discriminated against:

Kimberle Crenshaw, a founder of critical race Theory and the progenitor of the concept of intersectionality...argues (123)...that...discrimination

on grounds of race or gender is insufficient to deal with this problem or with the fact that a black woman, for instance, might experience unique forms of discrimination that neither white women nor black men face. (Pluckrose and Lindsay)

This worldview makes peace, tranquility, joy to be a moving target because there are varying levels of potential discrimination, and this could change with everyone.

About five or six miles east of here is an intersection in Red Lion. Years ago, there was nothing other than a small restaurant called Mom's Restaurant. At that time, there was an intersection where three roads converged, forming a five-way intersection. You can imagine why a five-way intersection could be dangerous. In like manner, the concept of Intersectionality argues that those with the most intersections of discrimination are the most oppressed. This creates a lot of uncertainty and presents a moving target for the path towards peace and tranquility. It is a moving target because there is so much volatility within this very system.

This is why the message of I John is so refreshing because there is no moving target. Our fellowship with each other is truly in One — that is God through Christ. Our joy is complete in the unchanging, written witness accounts of the whole Christ. This I John introduction lays the groundwork for the rest of the letter. You cannot separate joyful assurance from particular spoken truths of Christ:

John 15:11 KJV 1900

¹¹ These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that* your joy might be full.

Is your life rooted in the apostolic testimony of Jesus Christ? Root your life in certain apostolic testimony of Jesus Christ. Is “Jesus as our perfect Substitute” a one-time truth or an everyday truth in your heart? Repeat often the need of Jesus Christ as our Substitute (and by implication our utter sinfulness and source of power). Is your basis of fellowship the Person of Jesus as clearly revealed in scripture, as opposed to a Christ shaped by tradition or preferences? Resolve that the complete truth of Jesus Christ is the basis of fellowship (and by implication not dividing over lesser matters). Have you considered your life in comparison to eternity?

The written and preserved testimony of Jesus must be our stable source for fullness of joy. Joyful assurance is fundamentally based upon the testimony of Scripture. Critical Theory cannot offer you complete, joyful assurance, which is only found through Christ revealed in the inerrant Word of God.