



THE BIG IDEAS BEHIND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

6 Reasons Why CRT is Unbiblical

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Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been around for nearly four decades. In the last ten years, it has increasingly become a force to be reckoned with in culture and in the academic world. CRT is now being taught in many schools and is the ideology that informs many current movements aimed at social activism, social justice, and racial justice. Because the driving ideas behind CRT are being taught in schools, many people see the worldview presented by CRT as factual and do not consider further whether or not the claims of CRT are *true*. Despite the mounting influence of CRT, many people are still not sure exactly what CRT is. Then there is the question, is CRT in line with a biblical worldview? As Christians, it is crucial that we know if the ideas behind CRT are biblical, and what degree of common ground Christians might find with those who embrace CRT.

This ebook will examine how CRT is not a biblical worldview and includes a number of dangerous ideas that can lead to unbiblical conclusions, but we will also see that CRT does share Christianity's concern for practicing justice. We must be able to critique the ideas within CRT, while engaging charitably with those who are advocates for CRT or who find some of the ideas of CRT appealing. What we think about CRT has profound implications for how we understand the message of the gospel and how we live out the gospel. To be able to speak well within culture about the biblical ideas of race, justice, and unity, we need to be able to engage with the ideas and claims of CRT.

WHAT IS CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT)?

Origins

CRT was born out of Critical Theory (CT), which is a philosophical and sociological movement (also known as The Frankfurt School) that began in the twentieth century at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. Generally, a critical theory is one that provides a framework for identifying and alleviating forms of domination in social structures.¹ Theories are described as critical insofar as they seek to “liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them.”²

Critical Race Theory is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Purdue University explains,

*Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is a theoretical and interpretive mode that examines the appearance of race and racism across dominant cultural modes of expression. In adopting this approach, CRT scholars attempt to understand how victims of systemic racism are affected by cultural perceptions of race and how they are able to represent themselves to counter prejudice.*³

CRT’s goal is to liberate people of color from the enslavement of racism. On this point, the teaching of CRT and the teaching of Christianity are in firm agreement: unjust treatment of people based on the color of their skin is a great evil and we have a moral duty to stamp it out wherever we find it. Where the teachings of CRT and Christianity diverge is in how we should define racism and what exactly we should be doing to fight it.

Like all ideas, CRT reflects a worldview. The main ideas within CRT were derived from a postmodern, Marxist worldview. Because it is birthed from CT, CRT frames human existence through the Marxist lens of “Oppressor” and “Oppressed,” placing all members of society in one of these two groups. This grouping is based on identity factors such as race, religion, gender, and socioeconomic status. CRT proposes activism as the solution to the societal problems created by the Oppressor/Oppressed dichotomy. For people of color, the goal of activism is to overthrow the Oppressors in society, using violence if necessary. The goal for white people, according to CRT, should be to ally themselves with people of color by divesting themselves of their own power and privilege to promote the goals of equity, liberation, and social justice.

In 1996, a paper by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate IV entitled “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education” profoundly changed the field of CRT. The paper took CRT from within the limits of the legal realm and introduced it into the broad field of education. This paved the way for CRT to be used as a necessary standard in other academic disciplines including mathematics, the sciences, and many other fields. It ensured that rising generations of students would be taught the principles of CRT.



CRT's Story of Humanity

CRT tells a story of the human condition that is very different from the Christian story of the human condition. First, CRT does not propose or assume that humans are made by a Creator. Coming out of a Marxist worldview, CRT is by default atheistic. Thus, human identity, according to CRT, is not primarily as God's creatures; our identities are as members of various social groups competing for dominance and power.

Second, CRT's categories of Oppressor and Oppressed do not make room for all people to take personal responsibility for their actions. CRT's categories encourage people to think of themselves as permanently being either Oppressed or Oppressors. Both Oppressed and Oppressors can identify their wrong actions or difficult situations as the result of their position as Oppressed or an Oppressor, rather than taking individual responsibility. This can give both Oppressed and Oppressors a "victim of circumstances" mentality.

Finally, CRT does not facilitate reconciliation or true forgiveness. CRT aims for justice but does not have an interest in mercy. CRT's desire for justice is shared with Christianity, but because of the sin within all human beings, biblical justice without mercy would mean punishment for everyone. Thankfully, God in his mercy does not dispense justice apart from mercy. True biblical justice must also include mercy (Micah 6:8) and foster forgiveness, something that CRT does not do.

6 REASONS WHY CRITICAL RACE THEORY IS UNBIBLICAL

Reason 1: CRT asserts that the most important thing determining our identity is our skin color.

While skin color can play a role in our experiences and how we are perceived by others, to claim that one's identity is primarily determined by skin color is unbiblical. In Scripture, our identity is primarily rooted in being image-bearers of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Skin color is rarely mentioned in Scripture as a defining characteristic, which strongly suggests that it is not the most important part about who we are. The most important thing about who we are as human beings is our identity in Christ, which is the basis of human dignity and equality.

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CRT defines racism as a structured system of oppression determined by one's skin color. Systemic racism has been a very real thing (chattel slavery, Jim Crow laws, redlining), and for some people of color, the residual effects of racist laws are still felt in their communities and in their everyday lives. It can take more than the simple reversal of a law to heal the brokenness created by the sin of racism encoded in law. However, there are currently no racist laws that one can point to today in the United States as a system of laws that describe or allocate different treatment, access, or punishment based upon skin color.

But racist *laws* are not what CRT refers to as a “system of oppression.” To CRT, racism is built into any society in which there is a dominant (hegemonic) power socially or politically that can

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be identified by skin color. Whether or not there exist any overtly racist laws does not determine whether or not the “system” of a culture is racist. In a culture with a dominant group, the dominant group is inherently racist and oppressive to non-dominant groups. Therefore, CRT sees society’s main oppressors to be white people—most significantly, cisgender, heteronormative, able-bodied, Christian males. For CRT theorists, the very presence white males in society means hegemonic power, which means systemic racism.

The idea that racism is systemic should not be dismissed out of hand. Sin can be systemic. It can be codified into laws that go against God’s design. Slavery, Jim Crow laws, and legalized abortion are all examples of sin codified into law. However, CRT teaches that a dominant or majority group within a culture is *necessarily* racist and oppressive towards other groups. While the Bible does illustrate numerous instances in which majority groups have oppressed groups based on race or ethnicity (such as when the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt), the Bible does not suggest any sort of agreement with the assertion that majority groups are *necessarily* racist. A person or a system is not racist due to their position within society; rather, the underlying belief behind the sin of racism is the idea that race is a biologically significant factor in determining identity. Biblically, because our deepest identity is as creatures made in the image of God, there is nothing *fundamentally* different about two humans belonging to different ethnicities. There is nothing *fundamentally* different about two humans in different positions in society.

Biblically, racism is the sin of partiality. James tells us, “if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (James 2:8-9). CRT claims only white people can be racist because of their position within society. As one author explains it, “People of color are not racist because they do not systematically benefit from racism . . . Using the same logic, I reserve the word sexist for men.”⁴ However, anyone can show partiality—regardless of the color of skin. If racism is about showing partiality rather than who “systematically benefits,” anyone, not just white people, is capable of racism. As can be seen in an example of the ideology of The Black Panther Party, any group or individual can exhibit racist attitudes, regardless of the color of their skin.

Beyond mere partiality, racism can involve the sin of hatred. Hatred for someone based on their skin color, ethnicity, or nationality is an assault toward an image-bearer of God and a sin against God. A common command to Christians throughout the Bible is to not hate others (Lev 19:17-18, Mt 5:22, Eph 4:31). Inasmuch as racism is hatred, anyone can commit the sin of racism, regardless of their own skin color.



Reason 2: CRT asserts that the problem with humankind is a skin issue rather than a sin issue.

The problem with this assertion is the idea that what defiles us is our skin color rather than what is in our hearts. Rather than the biblical claim that all people are sinful (Romans 3:23), CRT suggests that our skin color determines whether we are the Oppressors or the Oppressed. To CRT, humanity's main problem in life is not sin, but oppression. This is counter to the biblical teaching that the central problem with humankind comes from within, not from without (Mark 7:15, Matthew 15:18-19).

Because CRT gets the problem with humankind wrong, it also gets the solution wrong. CRT sees the solution to humankind's problem to be antiracist activism. Through antiracist activism, CRT attempts to enact social and cultural transformation to create social justice. A key way in which justice is achieved is by making Oppressors accountable, repaying past oppression by righting past wrongs.

For example, CRT views all white people today as guilty by associated or collective guilt for the sin of slavery. While slavery was abolished in 1865, according to CRT it is the responsibility of present-day white people to pay for the sins of historical white people because they (present-day white people) are part of the same Oppressor group that white slaveholders were a part of.

CRT's approach to social justice and racial reconciliation is far removed from biblical ideas of justice and unity. CRT expects whites to "repent and atone" for the actions of their ancestors, but does not acknowledge any avenues for legitimate reconciliation between the Oppressors and the Oppressed. CRT's "justice" is not the same as biblical justice, which forbids excluding according to group status. Biblical justice requires that we "not show partiality to the poor nor give preference to the great," and that we consider everyone fairly (Leviticus 19:15). According to CRT, justice is only for the Oppressed. Biblical justice is for both the victim and the accused (Micah 6:8, Exodus 23:1-3).

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Reason 3: CRT judges people based on their outward appearance.

The Bible clearly teaches that we are not to judge others based on appearances. God tells the prophet Samuel, "The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). The principle extracted from this scripture points out that we err when we make superficial judgments based on outward characteristics that are independent of one's character. The Bible rejects CRT's assumption that it is possible to accurately judge individuals or entire groups of people based upon their outward appearance.

Jesus echoes the Old Testament's teaching that we are not meant to judge based on appearances. Faced by an unfriendly crowd, he admonished them to "Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly" (John 7:24). If we are to follow this exhortation, we cannot categorize and judge people based upon skin color, as CRT does. Dr. Martin Luther King's iconic "I Have A Dream" speech, delivered in 1963, promotes the hope of a world in which his children would not be judged by the color of their skin, but rather by the content of their character. CRT crushes that dream. CRT advocates for people to deliberately judge one another by the color of their skin rather than the content of their character or by their individual choices.

Reason 4: CRT asserts that an entire population of people are permanently racist, simply because of the color of their skin.

Central to CRT's philosophy is the belief that racism is normal, permanent, and pervasive. Critical Race theorists Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic write, "Racism is a normal part of American life, often lacking the ability to be distinctively recognized and thus is difficult to eliminate or address . . . A CRT lens unveils the various forms in which racism continually manifests itself, despite espoused institutional values regarding equity and social justice."⁵ Robin DiAngelo expands on the idea that racism is pervasive when she writes, "The question is not 'Did racism take place?' but rather 'In which ways did racism manifest in this specific context?'"⁶ DiAngelo uses anecdotal evidence to prove her point, stating, "No person of color whom I've met has said that racism isn't at play in his or her friendships with white people."⁷ Not only is racism normal and pervasive according to CRT, it is also unavoidable. Ijeoma Oluo claims that merely by living in a dominantly white culture (what she calls a "white supremacist society") you are automatically racist.⁸ This is why "racial microaggressions" are "often automatic or unconscious."⁹ But it does not logically follow to label a specific ethnic group as "racists," when many of them have never intentionally behaved in a prejudiced or discriminatory manner toward another individual on the basis of skin color. Calling individuals racist simply on the basis of their color is itself racist. Christians in particular should take care to avoid "speaking evil of others" by making claims that misrepresent others' actions, beliefs, or attitudes (James 4:11, Exodus 23:1).

Scott David Allen explains why the idea that racism is permanent or an unavoidable sin is counter to biblical teaching. He writes,

We have to be careful not to categorically view representatives of powerful, often oppressive systems as irredeemably evil. God shows His love to such people throughout the Scripture. Jesus sought out and forgave Zacchaeus, a hated [tax] collector and traitorous agent of



the powerful, cruel, and oppressive Roman Empire. He befriended Nicodemus, a powerful member of the Sanhedrin that eventually condemned Him to death. He even chose Cornelius, a powerful Roman soldier, to be among the first Christians, commanding Peter to welcome him into the fledgling, largely Jewish church. If God can extend His grace to people who are a part of oppressor groups, so should we.¹⁰

For reasons such as those presented by Allen, Christians should counter the CRT narrative that in every situation racism is normal, present, and pervasive. By CRT's definition of racism, allegations of racism can be made without any evidence of racism. This suggests that when the sin of racism is present in the human heart that it is a permanent condition. Such a suggestion is an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ because it limits the scope of who he is as our Savior, his perfect and sufficient sacrifice on the cross, and his ability to free us from sin (John 3:16-17, Rom 6:6-8). This is an important point that Christians should not overlook. Was Jesus's sacrifice on the cross sufficient for all sins, including racism, or was his sacrifice only sufficient for some sins?

Reason 5: CRT trades objective truth for subjective truth.

Specifically, according to CRT, subjective truth is validated based on one's skin color. Special access to truth and moral credibility is gained by being a member of a disadvantaged minority group. The assumption that skin color gives a person credibility is problematic. It means that with regard to things such as police shootings and accusations of racism, there is no need to pursue truth because what is true has already been decided based upon skin color. Many people are quick to believe an accusation of racism based upon the color of the person making the accusation rather than looking

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at the facts surrounding the situation. To believe that a person’s narrative is true based primarily on the fact that their skin color is dark is no more acceptable or morally creditable than assuming that a person’s narrative is true based primarily on the fact that their skin color is light. The body of Christ should be a model of what it means to pursue truth rather than pursuing any non-biblical narrative. CRT’s exalting subjective truth over objective truth allows people to pursue their preferred narrative rather than what is true.

Linked closely to CRT’s placing high value on experience and subjective truth is the idea that racism may be overt, but that it is often hidden or concealed beneath principles like colorblindness, meritocracy, and objectivity. What is or is not racist is in the eye of the beholder; if someone (particularly someone of a minority group in an area) thinks something is racist, then it is racist. Each of the aforementioned “axioms”—colorblindness, meritocracy, and objectivity—are said to be forms of racism because they “camouflage how racial advantage propels the self-interests, power, and privileges of the dominant group.”¹¹ According to CRT, there can be no discussion about whether or not these things are racist; whether or not the motivations behind them are meant to be racist is irrelevant, what matters is individuals’ subjective perceptions of these things.

In short, CRT asserts that “lived experience” is necessary to understand racism.¹² The only people able to discern what is racist are those who have been victims of racism: “It is about race—if a person of color thinks it is about race . . . We are, each and every one of us, a collection of our lived experiences . . . And our experiences are valid.”¹³ Voddie Baucham, in his book *Fault Lines*, calls the idea that lived experience gives special knowledge and insight “Ethnic Gnosticism.”¹⁴ The term *Gnosticism* comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means having secret knowledge. Ethnic Gnosticism is disconnected from tangible data, presuming on situations without the necessary information about the individuals involved that would lead to a proper conclusion. Ethnic Gnosticism is problematic because it suggests that only a select few have access to the secret knowledge of what is racist. Baucham disagrees with the “idea that somehow because of my ethnicity, because of my position as a minority, I know what oppression is and feels like and don’t need to necessarily have evidence for it.”¹⁵

We must ask ourselves, is it reasonable to elevate one’s lived experience (subjective truth) over objective truth? As Christians, we have a biblical and moral obligation to pursue truth based not *only* on emotion. Our beliefs about what is true cannot be formed wholly by our own emotions and

experiences. We *should*, however, consider our experiences as we form our understanding of reality. In the same way, we should lovingly strive to understand how others' experiences have shaped their understanding of reality. We do not have to throw out experience, but neither can we define truth *only* by our experiences; we must also pursue truth through facts and investigation (Exodus 20:16).

Reason 6: CRT's categories of "Oppressor" and "Oppressed" creates a mindset of victimhood and does not allow for personal accountability.

CRT suggests that minorities are oppressed by white people through systemic laws and "white privilege." As a result of this oppression, minorities have lost opportunities and are permanently disadvantaged. This creates a mindset of victimhood and encourages blaming others (both people and systems) for one's problems. This is not biblical. It runs counter to the theme found throughout Scripture that people are individually accountable and must take individual responsibility. (2 Cor 5:10, Romans 14:10-12, Jeremiah 17:10).

According to CT and CRT, racism is part of an interlocking system of oppression that intersects with sex, gender identity, and disabilities. This is known as "intersectionality," a term coined in 1989 by professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics "intersect." The conclusion reached by CRT from the theory of intersectionality is that to be "against" any group that is perceived as being oppressed makes a person an Oppressor in all areas. Anyone who does not align with CRT's views on sex and gender identity is racist by association because they are an Oppressor and therefore are also perpetuating racism. According to proponents of CRT, "To truly be antiracist is to be feminist, to truly be feminist is to be antiracist,"¹⁶ and, "We cannot be antiracist if we are homophobic or transphobic . . . To be queer antiracist is to understand the privileges of my cisgender, of my masculinity, of my heterosexuality, or their intersections."¹⁷

While it is true that there are those who oppress and those who are oppressed in the world and Christians should be deeply concerned with restoring justice for the oppressed, if we view all people only through the categories of Oppressed and Oppressors, we will have a wrong view of humanity. CRT views humanity through the lens of a person's inclusion in a category of Oppressors or Oppressed based on ethnicity. Specifically, white privilege and "whiteness" have led to the oppression of black people and other groups, automatically and unalterably putting white people in the category of Oppressors and black people and other people of color in the category of Oppressed. But God created humanity as one race, the human race, and we are all of one blood (Acts 17:26 NKJV). Within the human race are ethnicities, nationalities, people groups and tribes (Rev 7:9), but our primary identity is not ethnicity or people group.

The Bible divides people into categories such as "believers and unbelievers" and "male and female." In some situations people are grouped by nationality, but not by skin color. Our identity is determined by our Creator, because we are made as image bearers of God and have inherent dignity and worth based on our Creator, not our color (Genesis 1:26-27). In Christ, we are not defined by the labels of Oppressors and Oppressed; in Christ, all are one (Galatians 3:28).

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A key problem with CRT’s categories of Oppressor and Oppressed is that they do not foster an attitude of forgiveness, but rather they foster attitudes of resentment, blame, and victimhood. CRT’s claim that racism is permanent is problematic because it does not align with Scripture (John 8:36) and cannot help foster an attitude of forgiveness towards those who have sinned against us.

Rather than resentfully blaming others, the Bible calls us to forgive our enemies and to bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances we may have against one another. We are to forgive as the Lord forgave us, and to then put on love which binds us all together in perfect unity (Col 3:12-15). In a world where so much damage has been caused across racial lines, any hope for a *better* world must include the practice and desire to forgive and be forgiven. We must love our neighbors, and even our enemies (Matthew 5:43-44), without reference to their skin color, seeking to act justly towards all. CRT does not include a stipulation for forgiveness and reconciliation, and this omission makes its teaching irreconcilable with a biblical model for pursuing justice and overcoming oppression.

CONCLUSION

CRT has a strong appeal in today’s culture, for Christians and non-Christians alike. Some Christians have identified with CRT’s goal of liberating the oppressed from injustice and eliminating racism from our society but may not have considered the deeper implications or roots of CRT. It can be difficult to navigate conversations about racial justice, so CRT may seem like a sure guide. However, CRT is not in line with a biblical worldview, despite the fact that it shares some values and concerns with Christianity. Rather than using CRT as a guide for how to speak well within culture about race, justice, and unity, our view of these things must first and foremost be directed by the gospel and a biblical worldview. We must seek both justice and mercy, striving to love God and our neighbors without compromise.

TERMS USED IN CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Racism

According to CRT, race is a social construct used to divide humankind into superior groups and inferior groups based on ethnicity and skin color. Racism is a white supremacist ideology that privileges people who are defined and socially constructed as white. Racism treats all races as inferior to white people. CRT rejects the idea that racism is *merely* a personal, individual attitude, and instead asserts that racism is *primarily* systemic. Moreover, CRT claims that social and political systems are necessarily and unavoidably racist. Racist systems are systems of power (political systems, social systems, etc.) maintained by violence. An individual can be perpetuating these systems without even being conscious of it.

Antiracist

CRT defines antiracism as commitment to actively dismantling systems and institutions that produce racism. Joseph Barndt explains that an antiracist is “a person or community that develops an analysis of systemic racism, becomes committed to dismantling racism, and will not rest until ultimately escaping from the prison of racism.”¹⁸ CRT advocates differentiate between opposing racism and being antiracist. While someone who is merely opposed to racism may object to racism in theory, someone who is antiracist is actively engaged in dismantling “the structures that sustain a racist society.”¹⁹

Hegemony

Hegemony is the power and ability to impose your group’s values, expectations, and norms on the rest of society through oppressive structures and systems.

Intersectionality

A term coined in 1989 by professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, *intersectionality* describes how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics “intersect” with one another and overlap.

Standpoint Epistemology

Standpoint epistemology asserts that peoples’ personal experiences and perspectives are the primary way in which we know truth. In line with this view, CRT asserts that lived experience is important when confronting racism, and elevates lived experience over objective truth. Neil Shenvi explains, “Critical Theory bypasses the question of whether the claim is true and shifts the focus of the discussion to the claimant’s group identity.”²⁰ *Standpoint epistemology* can be used to “universally validate the experiences and beliefs of people of color while simultaneously invalidating the experiences and beliefs of anyone deemed by CRT to be racist: “If the person making the claim belongs to an Oppressor group, the answer is easy. You say, ‘Of course *you’d* say that; you’re just trying to preserve your power or privilege.”²¹

White Fragility

A term coined by critical racial and social justice educator Robin DiAngelo, *white fragility* is defined as “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress . . . becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves.”²²

White Privilege

White privilege is “the set of social and economic advantages that white people have by virtue of their race in a culture characterized by racial inequality.”²³

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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CRT AUTHORS, ADVOCATES, AND THINKERS

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7. Kafi Kumasi, author of *Beyond Critique: Exploring Critical Social Theories and Education*
8. Nicholas Hartlep, author of *Going Public: Critical Race Theory*
9. Patricia Hill Collins, author of *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*
10. Beverly Daniel Tatum, author of *Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*

FURTHER RESOURCES ON CRT

1. Voddie Baucham, *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism’s Looming Catastrophe*
2. Scott David Allen, *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice: An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis*
3. Neil Shenvi, shenviapologetics.com
4. Jeff Myers, *What is a Biblical Worldview of Justice?*
5. Jeff Myers, *20 Things to Say and Do to Fight Cancel Culture*
6. Jeff Myers, David Anderson, Derek McCoy, *Race, Protest, Justice—a Conversation*
7. Kevin DeYoung, “[Racial Reconciliation](#): What We (Mostly, Almost) All Agree On, and What We (Likely) Still Don’t Agree On”
8. Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*
9. Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*

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