

Critical Theory with Dr. Neil Shenvi

(December 18, 2020)

Ladies and gentlemen, have you ever heard anyone say things like: White people have no authority to speak on racism? Or you're just trying to maintain your privileged position? Or you're homophobic, transphobic, Islamophobic? Or maybe you've heard you know, you're just a man; you have no right to speak about abortion, you just want to control women's bodies. And what about canceled culture? Where did that come from? Well, some of it may have come from something known as critical theory. You've probably heard this term being thrown around in recent days. What is critical theory, does it comport with biblical Christianity, and how can we know more about it, and what kind of questions can we ask about it if people are bringing it up in our churches?

And there's probably nobody better to talk about this than Dr. Neil Shenvi. And if you haven't heard of Dr. Neil Shenvi you need to learn about him. His website is ShenviApologetics.com. Neil, get this was not a Christian, he went to Princeton as an undergrad, then he went to the University of California at Berkeley and became a Christian there while he was pursuing his PhD in Theoretical Chemistry. He's also had affiliations with Yale and Duke and some other places. And along the way, he got very skilled at the issue of critical theory: What is it? Does it comport with Christianity? How can [we] respond to it? He's married to a medical doctor, and in recent years, he has given up, actually, his career, so to speak, in either theoretical Christianity to, actually, homeschool his four kids. So, it's a great pleasure to have Neil on with me. This is the first time we've met. Neil, how are you?

Neil:

Good. Thank you, Frank.

Frank:

Neil, it's great, the work that you've been doing. I've been following you on your website for a few weeks now just trying to learn more about critical theory. And before we get into what

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critical theory is, how do you, a theoretical chemist, who is like an expert in quantum mechanics as well...how did you even get into this?

Neil:

Into critical theory? Well, it's a long story. So, about five years ago, I began noticing a drift in culture. Now, I was not very concerned about that. So, as a Christian, I became very interested in apologetics, because I wanted to share the gospel with my non-Christian co-workers, who are scientists. They're often skeptics, agnostics. So, I learned all the standard arguments about: Does God exist? Is the Bible reliable? things like that. So, I was not concerned with addressing cultural issues, per se. But then five years ago, around the time that Black Lives Matter took off, I began seeing this drift in people's questions. They weren't asking, Is Christianity true? They were asking things like, Is Christianity on the side of the oppressed? I thought, huh, that's kind of strange, because as a scientist, I care more about truth. I mean, we can have ethics that flow out of truth, but you have to get the truth right first.

And then I met my collaborator, Dr. Pat Sawyer, around the same time, and he has a PhD in Education and Cultural Studies and did his dissertation on this subject. So, talking to him, I was like, huh, these ideas that you're discussing sound a lot like what I'm hearing, both in the culture and even in the angelical church. And we began collaborating and I began reading more and more and more. That's how I got into this area. And as you can sort of see, it's really exploded in the last five years. So that's what I did.

Frank:

Yeah, and before we get into critical theory, I do have to ask you this question. My mentor, Dr. Geisler, used to call Berkeley "Beserk-eley". And the question is, how did a man like you, who went to Berkeley as a non-Christian, come out as a Christian?

Neil:

Right. Well, God does still work miracles today, is the short answer. My future wife, Christina, I knew her in college. And we were dating. I was not a Christian, which is always a dangerous proposition, but what we intended for evil God intended for good. So, I began going to church with her and I heard the gospel preached. And I loved CS Lewis as a non-Christian. I'd read, The Screwtape Letters, like 10 times, but I just couldn't believe it. But then when I got to Berkeley,

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and I met intelligent Christians...you know, my professors were Christians, some of them, not all of them. And I was forced to confront this question, Is Christianity true?, for the first time, and to really, really consider it. And God just made me realize, you know what, you are in need of a Savior. And that's the beginning of my Christian journey. Obviously, I had a long way to go to my theology, but it just starts with recognizing, man, I'm a sinner who needs a savior.

Frank:

So, would it be fair to say that your wife, who was brought up on the mission field, right...

Neil:

Yeah.

Frank:

...she was instrumental in bringing you to Christ.

Neil:

Yes, absolutely.

Frank:

Amazing. And you then got into critical theory. And of course, you have other issues on your website, other topics you cover.

Neil:

Sure.

Frank:

But today, we're just talking about critical theory. So, can you, kind of, give us an overview of critical theory? What is it? And how could it be, for some, a substitute for Christianity?

Neil:

Great question. So, critical theory is a very broad area of knowledge that pretty much scholars agree goes back to the writings of Karl Marx. So, that's the consensus that he was the first true critical theorist, in the words of Bradley Levinson who wrote, Beyond Critique. But later critical

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theorists coined the phrase, critical theory. The Frankfurt School, a group of sociologists and philosophers, early in the 1930s in Germany, they coined the term, critical theory, to describe their project. And they wanted to apply Marx's ideas beyond just economics. They wanted to apply it to things like culture, and to mass media, and to understand the other ways in which power operated to produce oppression and inequality. But even that was 80 years ago, and since then, and critical theory has created entire disciplines, like critical race theory, queer theory, critical pedagogy, critical legal studies. Even post-modernism and second wave feminism are critical social theories that have spun off of this original idea of critical theory.

Now what do they all have in common? All of these fields, they are all trying to understand how power operates to produce social oppression to produce inequalities. And then their goal is not merely to understand these inequalities, but to erase them. Their goal is liberation. They want to free people from oppression in all of its various forms. And so, different subfields, like critical race theory, will apply this critical lens to race. Queer theory would apply this critical lens to gender and sexuality. Post-colonial studies would apply that lens to imperialism, empires and colonies. So, there are a lot of different fields that would fall under this broad category of critical theory.

Frank:

So, how could it be seen as a substitute for Christianity? How does it give meaning to people's lives?

Neil:

That's exactly right. So, you could say, well, critical theory is very broad, it's diverse and it's complicated. That's all true. What you're seeing today is, sort of, this coalescence of these various disciplines into this one worldview. So, a number of people are recognizing that we're seeing today, in this sort of, "woke movement" is actually functioning as a worldview. So, Lindsay and Pluckrose, in their book, *Cynical Theories*, call it, repeatedly, a metanarrative. Ibram X. Kendi, who wrote the book, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and *Stamped from the Beginning*; he's an Africana Studies scholar and historian. He's very much woke. But he says that this anti-racist movement, it meets the same spiritual urges that were filled by his parent's Christianity. So, he's a, sort of, critical theorist who's saying, yes, this is fulfilling spiritual needs.

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So, I do think of it as a worldview. And why is that? Well, it answers basic questions like: Who am I? What's the problem with humanity? What is the solution to that problem? What's my purpose in life? So, contemporary critical theory, as exemplified in these various disciplines, it answers those big life questions that can also be answered by Christianity, or Buddhism, or atheism, naturalism. So, that's why I would consider this movement, whatever you want to call it, whether you call it Cultural Marxism, which I don't like that term, or intersectionality. But it is, essentially, acting as a worldview.

Frank:

We're talking to Dr. Neil Shenvi. His website, ShenviApologetics.com. Trust me. Excellent writing on this issue and many other issues. And when we get back from the break, we're going to talk a lot more about this, so don't go anywhere. You're listening to, I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, with Frank Turek on the American Family Radio Network. Back in two.

Ad:

Friends, can you help me with something? Can you go up to iTunes or wherever you listen to this podcast and give us a five-star review? Why? It will help more people see this podcast and therefore then hear it. So, if you could help us out there, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Frank:

Welcome back to, I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, with Frank Turek on the American Family Radio Network. My guest is Neil Shenvi. We are talking about critical theory. We're going to get into how it comports with Christianity, if it does at all, or where it doesn't, and give you some questions you can ask people who are interested in critical theory or advocating for it.

Before I do, I want to mention that on January 1, 2021, we're starting the, Essentials of Christianity course, and I'll be your instructor online. If you join the premium version, I'll be with you for live Q&A on zoom on seven different occasions. If you really want to know the essentials of Christianity, and how to defend them, how to interact with others, how to major in the majors and not major in the minors, then join me for the, Essentials of Christianity course. You'll see it if you go to CrossExamined.org, click on online courses, you'll see it there. We have several other courses coming up in 2021, as well. So, if you want to be a part of that, sign up

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soon, because we only take a limited number in the premium version, so we'll have time for Q&A on the zoom sessions.

Okay, back to Dr. Neil Shenvi. Neil, is it fair to say that we might say the big picture of Christianity is, we have sin, we have repentance, and then, ultimately, we have salvation? And in critical theory, it's similar, except you have oppression, activism, and then liberation.

Neil:

Right Exactly right. So, it's a metanarrative; it's an overarching story that allows you to understand reality, to make sense of it. And as you said, it begins, not with creation, like, we're created by a good and loving and a holy God, our problem is sin, the solution is Jesus came to rescue us, and then the end goal is God freeing us and God renewing the universe. The trajectory is, there are these groups that are oppressing people, these power structures that need to be dismantled, these systems and structures need to be taken apart by us, not by God; then the goal is diversity, equity and inclusion. It's sort of like, the new heavens and new earth within this worldview is a state of equity.

Frank:

Well, before we get into the central tenets, let's ask this question: What does critical theory get right? Because there are some things that critical theorists talk about...I mean, there is oppression. Right? I mean, there is evil. Right? There is systematic oppression sometimes. So, tell us about some of the things it gets right first.

Neil:

Right. So, because they look at groups and structures, they identify, sometimes correctly, the systematic oppression. For example, obviously, chattel slavery in the United States, apartheid in South Africa, even abortion today; these are not just individual people doing evil things. Well, they are, but it's also built into our laws, even our norms, our values, we [unintelligible] it's taken for granted. So, here critical theorists are very attuned to looking at those systems of, what we'd say are evil or sin, not just individual acts. Now, they get to an extreme, they almost ignore the individual and only focus on these groups. But they do get the group's pictures, sometimes, they get them right.

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They also talk a lot about how ideas and values and norms can shape culture and shape our way of thinking. Well, again, that's true. If you've ever been in a conversation with a pro-choice person, you know that their values have been shaped by what they see on the news, in the media and movies. So, we do have to ask ourselves: Am I being reformed to what scripture says or am I being conformed to the shape of the world, right? It's the idea of these ideas that are shaping our behavior, it's called hegemony within critical theory. That's a real phenomenon.

And then smaller things, or sub-issues, like the idea that race is a social construct. It's a very big idea within critical race theory. Well, as a Christian, that's obviously true. God created us out of Adam and Eve. We are all one blood; Paul says in Acts 17. And so, absolutely, you know, we are not divided into these different biological categories of race. But actually, we've constructed these categories, even though we share a common human nature. So, there are many things we can say that are true that critical theorists highlight.

That's important because what happens is, Christians oftentimes are not very aware of our country's horrific racial history. They hear it for the first time from critical race theorists and that leads them to treat these critical race theorists like they're oracles; like they're infallible. Like, oh my gosh, they never heard these things, so they invest way too much authority to them. And what we can do as Christians is, we can say, hey, I do want to talk about race and racism, I want to talk about justice. But I want to do it, and I can do it, from a Christian perspective. I don't have to borrow from these poisonous and toxic ideologies.

Frank:

Well, tragically, one of the organizations...I don't know if it's fair to call it an organization...but let's just say the church overall, that has been a systematic oppressor on race issues. Has it? The church has been that. Right? For many years. It's only in recent years the church in American, anyway, finally go, you know what, yeah, okay, we've been wrong about race for so long.

Neil:

Right.

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Frank:

So critical race theorists are correct, that there are systematic, or there have been systems of oppression, even within the church with regard to race. And so, toward the end of the show, I want to ask you, Neil, what are some things we can do to improve race relations in the church? But now, if we can, kind of give us...you, in what your articles, talk about, sort of, six tenants of critical theory. Can you, kind of, go through those quickly? Kind of give us an overview of what they believe?

Neil:

Sure. So, I'll simplify down to four; four core tenants of the contemporary critical theory; the stuff we're seeing on campuses today. So, the first idea is the social binary. I'm gonna quote from Sensoy and DiAngelo in their book, *Is Everyone Really Equal?*. So, they believe that society is divided into dominant oppressor groups and subordinate oppressed groups in different ways. They say this, "for every social group, there's an opposite group. The primary groups that we name here are race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, status, sectionality, religion, and nationality." And they have actual charts showing these various oppressor groups and oppressed groups. Their suppressions are, they list them here, racism, sexism, ableism, classism, anti-Semitism, religious oppression, etc. It's from Adams' book, *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. So, they have these tables that breaks all society down into oppressed groups and oppressor groups. So, that's the first idea of the social binary.

Second, this is important, oppression through ideology. So, critical theorists redefine a lot of terms. They redefine them. That's important to realize. So, oppression traditionally means tyranny, coercion, violence. But critical theorists have redefined it. Here, listen to Iris Young in her essay, *Five Faces of Oppression*. She writes, "in its new usage, oppression designates disadvantage and injustice some people suffer, not because a tyrannical power coerces them but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits and symbols. So, the idea here is that you can be oppressed, but not because you're being coerced or treated violently, but by the ideas themselves. So, the dominant groups, these whites, men, heterosexuals, they impose their ideas on culture, and we all imbibe these ideas, and that is oppression. So, that's the idea of oppression through ideology or hegemonic power.

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Third, lived experience. So, oppressed people have more access to truths about reality through their lived experience. They have special insight into truths because they are oppressed, whereas people that are oppressors are actually blinded by their very privilege.

Frank:

So, Neil, in that regard, that might explain why they might say, well, you're a white person...well, you're not. You're a part Indian, right? They might say to me, you're a white person so you can't speak on racism.

Neil:

Exactly right. Or you'd say, you're a man, you can't speak on abortion.

Frank:

Right.

Neil:

Or you're a heterosexual. And then...we'll get to this later, but they would say, in fact, when you say, well, I'm not saying what I believe, I'm saying what the scripture teaches. They would argue that, actually, that's how dominant groups impose their ideas on culture. They position those ideas that are oppressive. They claim that they are objective, and natural, and just common sense. But really, they're just a ways to justify those dominant group's power over you.

Frank:

That's interesting. I had a debate, Michael Brown and I debated a couple of folks from the LGBT community on, Does Love Require Approval. And at one point, I quoted a Bible verse, and the guy on the other side said, that's a white interpretation.

Neil:

Yes, yep.

Frank:

And I went, what? White? What does that mean?

Neil:

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Did you interpret it or just quote it?

Frank:

No, actually, I was talking about, thou shalt not murder. And he said, that's a white interpretation. And I went, what do you mean?

Neil:

The interesting thing is that, again, the way that they think reality works, so this goes back to Foucault, they think that all truth claims are bids for power. So, when you say two plus two equals four, they would ask, what makes you say that? What's your game? It's how they view power.

Frank:

Yeah. Is that I've seen some scholars, so-called scholars, say that math is racist?

Neil:

Yes, absolutely. Because it's, again, in Foucault's language, or Derrida's language, it's imposing a certain regime of truth on people. And you have to ask: Who's benefiting from that? Who's getting credentials? Who's getting the degrees? Who's getting the public voice? The public square? So, they have a very cynical view of all truth claims, including things like, two plus two equals four.

Frank:

But do they have cynical views of their own truth claims?

Neil:

No. So, there's a lot of inconsistency here. But yeah, the idea, though, is that lived experience is what enables you to see through these bids for power. So, if you are a black person, or half Indian, [unintelligible], but close enough, or if you're a woman, you can see through these bids for power and see them as they actually are. Whereas, if you're a white male who's heterosexual then you're just blinded by your privilege,

Frank:

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I know you got one more. You got four and we'll get to it. But let me say this, though, Neil, because it just seems so odd to me that people would say things like this. They say, there is a metanarrative.

Neil:

Yeah.

Frank:

Right? So, they're not post-modernists.

Neil:

Right.

Frank:

Right? Because post-modernists say there is no metanarrative.

Neil:

Yet.

Frank:

And they're saying that truth can be imposed by power and truth often is imposed by power. But don't they see that if they win the day, that they are suddenly going to be imposing their truth on people, and would that be oppression, then?

Neil:

Yes, and this is a good segue to my last point. The goal of all of this is social justice. Now, they see social justice in terms of, again, breaking down the social binary. So, they want to elevate the oppressed groups, they want to break down these barriers, so that power can be shared between groups. So, you say, wouldn't it be that if they gained cultural power, as it seems like they are gaining power, and they impose their metanarrative on the rest of us, wouldn't they be the oppressor group?

Frank:

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Right.

Neil:

The answer is twofold. Number one, they would say, well, our metanarrative is different because ours is liberatory. They would say, unlike your metanarratives, our metanarrative is actually going to liberate everybody, both oppressed and oppressor. But this is why you see such infighting. This is why various groups are vying for power as who's more oppressed. So, you see conflict between say, radical feminists, on the one hand, like old school feminists, and the queer theorists. Because old school feminists will say, no, you can't just declare yourself to be a woman and therefore be a woman. Whereas queer theorists will say, yes, you have to do that and you're being a trans-exclusive radical feminist. You're excluding us, you're a bigot. You have people like JK Rowling getting on the wrong side of the trans-activists. So, you do see this fighting over who is actually an oppressor. Exactly what you said.

Frank:

Well, when we come back from the break, we're going to go much further, if you can follow the logic here about critical theory. My guest is Dr. Neil Shenvi. His website ShenviApologetics.com. Well worth reading. He's very clear on this issue, and other issues, as you can tell from the interview. And I'm Frank Turek. We're gonna be back in just two minutes, so don't go anywhere.

Ad:

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Frank:

Blessings this Christmas, ladies and gentlemen. Yeah, we can say Christmas here on the American Family Radio Network. That's who you're listening to. The great AFA, the American

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Family Association that helps put this on. And I'm Frank Turek. Our website is CrossExamined.org. And this show is called, I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. I'm Frank Turek. My guest Dr. Neil Shenvi. We're talking about critical theory. Hey, Neil, before we move into whether or not this comports with Christianity, can you just review the four basic tenets of critical theory as you see them?

Neil:

Yeah, so contemporary critical theory is based around these four ideas. The social binary, that's oppressors and oppressed. Number two is oppression through ideology, so ideas are oppressive, anything that explains why one group deserves to be in power is oppression. Third idea is, a lived experience gives you insight into truths if you're an oppressed person, and on the contrary, people that are oppressors are blinded by their lives. And then, finally, the goal of all of this is social justice, which means the elimination of all of social binary. So, all these groups are going to share power. There can be no one dominant hegemonic narrative anymore. So, these are the four ideas.

Frank:

Before we get into Christianity, specifically then, and how it comports with that, I got one other question.

Neil:

Sure.

Frank:

I've seen you write an article on your website, ShenviApologetics.com, that you say, as Christians, we probably ought not use the term social justice because it means different things to different people. When I think of social justice, I think of taking care of the poor, taking care of orphans, taking care of widows, that kind of thing. You're saying that, today, social justice in the culture would mean what?

Neil:

It would mean the elimination of all forms of social oppression, where oppression is defined according to critical theory. I can give you quotes here. But yeah, my take on this is that we

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should just avoid the term because it's confusing. It's not tainted. It's not got cooties. You can use a term to mean a biblical justice. Sure, you can. But if a young Christian, or non-Christian, hears you utter those words, they might be confused by what you mean by them. So, I would just prefer a different term so here's no confusion. It's like using the term, reproductive justice. You can redefine that term in a certain way that's a biblical, but people will hear it and assume you mean being pro-choice. So, you might as well use a term that's clear.

Frank:

Yeah, terms are important. And as you know, cults of Christianity, like Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons, will use the same language, but the meaning of who Jesus is, for example, is different than...if they just say Jesus, they don't mean the Jesus of the New Testament, they mean the spirit brother or Lucifer, or something like that, right. I mean, so terms are very important. So, I agree with you, we probably ought not use a term that can be interpreted differently. Now, where does CRT get away from biblical Christianity? Where is it incompatible?

Neil:

Well, yeah, you have critical theory, broadly, and CRT is one subset of that. But broadly speaking, if you're looking at the worldview to answer these big picture questions, well, it's a worldview. You can't have two worldviews running around in your head together. It's like Highlander; there can be only one. So, if you try to syncretize Christianity and this contemporary critical theory, you're going to be forced to choose between them constantly, in terms of your resources, your ethics, what you value, what you think is moral. There's so many ways in which they're gonna conflict.

The second big way in which they conflict is epistemology. That means, how do you know the truth? So, remember, critical theorists are very skeptical of truth claims, drawing on post-modernism. They view truth claims as bids for power. And they're very skeptical of them. Well, that's a problem because we're always making truth claims as Christians. And if you say, well, I'm gonna doubt truth claims that are bids for power, well then, what do you say to someone who's saying: Well, your interpretation of the Bible is wrong here because it oppresses this group. Or your doctrine is wrong here because I'm a person of color and you're white. So, you have to bow to my interpretation because I have the greater knowledge through my lived experience. At some point, we have to say, look, I appreciate I could get things wrong. I want to

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always hold up my interpretations to Scripture and see which is true. But I can't just see all of that authority to someone because of their race, class, gender, sexuality, or whatever. So, that's one big one.

Another big one is just how we view our identities. So, critical theory chops us up into oppressors and oppressed groups all over the place. Well, the Bible, what does it say? The Bible says, no, actually, your fundamental identity is in Christ if you're a Christian. So, I can't walk into church on Sunday and say, oh, oppressor Christian, oppressed Christian, oppressor Christian, oppressed Christian. The first thing I have to see is my brother or sister in Christ. And if someone is not actually sinning against me personally, they're not an oppressor just because they happen to have a certain color skin or a certain gender. So, that idea will just tear the church apart. Paul rebukes that idea that we should divide this up along lines of Jew and Gentile, slave or free, male or female. He says, no, you're all one in Christ. We have this deep unity that should, actually, go beyond and transcend all these demographic markers. So, I could go on and on if you want me to keep...

Frank:

Well, let me just say this. It really seems to me, Neil...and correct me if I'm wrong here...you know this infinitely better than I do, but when Martin Luther King said that I want my children to be judged on the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. That seems biblical, but this seems the opposite of that. We're turning Martin Luther King on his head and the Bible on its head, to say that now everything is judged through race, for example, or through sexual behavior, or through gender. Am I missing something?

Neil:

No. So, one of the things that, you know, Martin Luther King is often held up as an example of, you know, his colorblindness.

Frank:

Right.

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Neil:

And interestingly enough, colorblindness is actually explicitly attacked by critical race theorists. They say colorblindness is a way of hiding racism. So, racism is hidden behind colorblindness. Now, is that possible to do that? It can be. You can pretend to be overtly colorblind, but then you're actually discriminating, or you have laws that are actually discriminatory. But by the letter [unintelligible], they look colorblind. But actually, I would say that Martin Luther King...so, I do think that they're kind of confused about what colorblindness ought to mean. And we should mean that we treat people kindly and we love them regardless of color. That's colorblindness. Right?

Frank:

Right.

Neil:

We can still acknowledge color that it exists. Obviously. Right? For example, like, you know, after the slaves were freed, immediately, in like, 1870, you don't have to say, well, I'm totally colorblind. I can't tell what color you are. Well, no, it matters. They're poor. They're sharecroppers now because of slavery. Let's address that issue. And we can pay attention to race. And even today, we can say, yeah, racism is a real problem. I can acknowledge it exists, and that it's a problem, without abandoning my colorblind moral principles.

But deeper than that, what's interesting is Martin Luther King always appealed to the Constitution, and to our founding documents, and he said, America, you're not living up to this promissory note. It's time for you to live up to your claim that all men are created equal. So, he was always appealing to these documents and its ideas and saying, I'm demanding you live up to them. Interestingly, critical race theory was created, in part, as a response to that. They were unhappy with that approach. They would say no, racism is built into our founding documents. They are suspicious of rights discourse and they question liberalism, meaning appealing to laws and abstract principles, as King did. So, in a deep way, critical race theory actually works against his whole approach to civil rights. And explicitly, actually, there are quotes I can give you and they say, we're dubious, we're skeptical of that approach to black progress.

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Frank:

So, going back to this issue of, they have a metanarrative, I thought I heard you say in another interview, though, that while they're not postmodern, because they do have a metanarrative, they also believe in moral absolutes. Is that fair to say?

Neil:

Yeah. Oppression is evil...

Frank:

Okay.

Neil:

...in their worldview. Absolutely true, right.

Frank:

Uh-huh.

Neil:

Injustice is good.

Frank:

Okay.

Neil:

So, they're not relativists.

Frank:

But how do they ground that? What's that grounded in? I mean, it seems to be, on one hand, they're saying this, Neil, they're saying that you have to believe me because I'm a black lesbian, a poor person, and so, I have more bonafides than, say, an average white person. And so, you have to believe me and my moral conclusions. I don't have to provide any evidence for anything I say, just because of the nature of my situation. How does that ground morality? Where do they get that from?

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Neil:

They don't try to. So, critical theorists are very pragmatic. They don't try to work from abstract principles and then draw out the conclusion. They don't do that.

Frank:

Okay.

Neil:

Their method is, they see a problem, they try to fix it within the imminent frame, what's happening right now. They're very proud of not trying to appeal to abstractions. The critical race theorist, for example, disdain appealing to abstract law. They want to look at case studies and stories and narratives. So, they don't even attempt to say, well, what's the moral grounding for these claims? There really aren't any.

Frank:

So, you've quoted several people in the writings that I've seen. Again, you can go to ShenviApologetics.com to see some of these writings. We can only cover a very small part of this, Neil. But in your writings, you point out that they don't appeal to reason. In fact, they will claim that, if you're using reason, you're just trying to hide your racism. So, how do you deal with a group of people that don't want to appeal to reason? How do you reason with people that reject reason? How do you persuade them? What do you do?

Neil:

Yeah. That's the 100 million dollar question, Frank. I don't know. I mean, I think people underestimate how pernicious this worldview is. It gets into your soul because it makes you feel good. You're on the right side of history. You care, you're compassionate, you tweet the right people, you vote for the right candidates. And so, when someone says to you, wait a minute, this doesn't make any sense, your righteousness is threatened, you feel like someone's attacking your justification. So, it is hard to reach people that have really imbibed this because they're just so convinced they're on the right team.

And so, I think, as Christians we have to, I think the best way to do it, number one, is to say, what is compassionate depends on what's true. If I see a man cutting you with a knife, and I

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stop him, is that a good or bad action stopping him? Well, depends. Is he a mugger or a surgeon?

Frank:

Right.

Neil:

If a person goes out and digs wells in, you know, in Asia, to provide free drinking water and I stop them up, am I evil or good? Well depends. Do I know the wells are infected with arsenic or not? If I'm doing it to keep the villagers safe from arsenic, I'm good. So, compassion depends on reality. And so, if people are so set on being compassionate, well you have to establish what's true first and then you can be compassionate. You can't start with emotion and work backwards to what's true.

Frank:

Neil, how do they avoid setting up a caste system? Because it appears that's what they're doing, that you have to have these certain characteristics, whether it's certain race, gender, whatever your sexual preference is...you know, if you have the right characteristics there, or the right preferences there, you're going to be higher than say, the white heterosexual male Christian. Isn't that a caste system? Isn't it oppression in itself?

Neil:

It is but it's not to them because they view everything in terms of groups. So, as long as they look at the structure of society, and they say, look, overall, we see whites with more wealth than blacks. Well, to them, if you are Oprah Winfrey, and you abuse and curse at your white valet, because he's white, you're not racist. Even though you're doing that because you're like, I hate white people, but you're not racist because the structure of society is such that whites are on top and people of color are on the bottom. So, they wouldn't see this as a caste system, because they're looking at, again, how wealth and resources are distributed at a large scale level, not one on one interaction.

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Frank:

Well, that's another thing we got to talk about right after the break, Neil, that people who are traditionally, say, African American, by definition can't be racist according to this theory. We'll talk about that and what you can do, what kind of questions you can ask, and ideas. We're coming back in a minute. I'm Frank Turek.

Ad:

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Frank:

If you're low on the FM dial, looking for National Public Radio go no further. We're actually going to tell you the truth here. You will never hear this on NPR. Our website is CrossExamined.org. And Dr. Neil Shenvi's website is ShenviApologetics.com. If you really want to dive into critical theory and learn more about it, go to his website, and you'll see right there on the homepage an icon about critical theory. And there are many articles and references that you can look up. But Neil, let's go back to what we just ended with, and that is, critical theorists redefine the term racism. What does it really mean, practically, to them?

Neil:

So, they would define racism as prejudice plus power. And they don't mean power, as in personal power, but your group's institutional power. So, because of that definition, a person of color cannot, by definition, be racist. They can be prejudiced, but not racist, because their group does not have institutional power.

Frank:

Okay, so if you're a black person in America, by definition, according to them, you can't be racist.

Neil:

Or Asian, or Hispanic, yeah.

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Frank:

And all white people are racist, according to them?

Neil:

Well, yeah. Some of them will say, like Robin DiAngelo will say that, because you are white, you're socialized into white supremacy, which they've redefined, of course. But you're socialized into this racist system that you are, just by socialization, racist. You are de facto, the way you think, the way you act. She, in an interview said, I'm as racist as Donald Trump. She says that. And she's the anti-racist educator. But she really believes that all white people, like herself, are racist.

Frank:

So, the narrative in her worldview is, Donald Trump is a racist and so is she.

Neil:

And so is she .

Frank:

Primarily because they're both white.

Neil:

Yes.

Frank:

This just takes all meaning out of the word. And I wonder how they think this is going to bring people aboard? I don't think they're concerned about that, because they just want to use oppression to bring people aboard, correct?

Neil:

Well, the funny thing is, too is, so they want to bring people aboard, yes. But then when people say, wait a minute, wait a minute, you can't just call me a racist because I'm white, that itself is racist, they call that white fragility. Oh, see, you're getting all upset because you don't like being called a racist, so you're fragile. So, you're proving my theory.

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Frank:

No matter what you do if you're not a minority...

Neil:

Yeah.

Frank:

Okay, you can admit to being a racist, and they'll go, yeah, you're right. And if you say, no, I'm not a racist, see, you're proven you're a racist.

Neil:

Yeah, you're fragile and, actually, even if you are a minority, so, they would say that I, if I say, well, your theory doesn't sound very good to me, they'd say, that's because you're white adjacent. So, even though you participate in whiteness, even though I'm not white, they'll say, but you are participating in whiteness, which is ideology, and so you still, again, have these racist ideas.

Frank:

Okay, so this is an unfalsifiable assertion.

Neil:

Yeah.

Frank:

Everybody who's not a minority is racist. Okay? All right, well, at least we know now.

Neil:

Not all of them will say that like DiAngelo does say that.

Frank:

Okay. All right. What are the signs that critical theory is seeping into your church? And what kind of questions can you ask somebody who is a supporter of critical theory?

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Neil:

So, one thing I would say is that one word to keep in your mind is asymmetry. Asymmetry. Whenever there is an asymmetry between how you treat people, how you think about different groups, what's acceptable behavior, when there is asymmetry, that's a good sign that there is critical theory seeping in there. So, for example, when people of color, or women, are allowed to do certain things that would be completely immoral for men to do, right...when there's allowances made, or when, you know, whites are all racist and people of color are never racist, that's a sign that you're imbibing these categories. Right?

So, here are the three questions you can ask or think about. If there's a call for anyone to repent of sins they didn't commit, that's unbiblical, right. We're guilty of the sins we commit, and there are lots of those, let me tell you. I'm a sinner every day, and yet, I'm not called to repent for sins that I didn't commit, or that some random person, you know, 10 generations ago committed. So, that's a big sign that they're imbibing a wrong view. You can go to the Bible and talk about Ezekiel 18, where it says, you know, that the person will die for their own sins, not for the sins of their father.

Second question is...

Frank:

Hold on, Neil, for second there, because I think you've written on this, too. I may misremember this, but some people will quote some Old Testament passages about people being guilty for sins that the nation has committed. But you point out that's a different covenant now. Can you explain that?

Neil:

That's right. You've read this article that Pat and I wrote on, Do Whites Need to Repent for Ancestral Sin. There are tons of differences between Israel and Christians today. And that seems to be obvious, right. They're a covenant nation. Whites are not a covenant people. We're just not. I mean, you're not. You're white. It's like redheads. Redheads aren't a covenant people. Spanish speakers aren't a covenant people. So, that's one big difference, but there are many other differences like that. And I think, if you think about it, be consistent...are you going to call every other demographic group to account for their corporate sins? We'd be shocked if I

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said, Neil, you're half Indian, you need to repent for the caste system in India. And I'm not going to be friends with you until you repent for that. Like, that's disgusting. I was born in California, man. So, I think we'd never be consistent with that standard. So, let's be consistent. But there are lots of reasons why that idea that we can repent corporately for these sins in a vague way is not biblical.

And second, the idea that, well, reconciliation, racial reconciliation, is contingent upon justice. Well, that's, actually, not true because, in the Bible, reconciliation is either between us and God, number one, obviously, but then also, if I sin against someone else, well, then we have to reconcile. If I punch you in the face, Frank, and then I say, I'm sorry, I repent, well, then we can be reconciled. But if I walk into the church, and I see you and I say, I don't like his face. Now, wait a minute, you can demand reconciliation, for we haven't sinned against each other, right.

In the same way, blacks and whites are reconciled in Christ and apart from individual sin. We can't demand that they reconcile. For what? For their ancestor's sin? We're reconciled in Christ. And then think about, again, think about logically, are we saying that a black husband and his white wife are not reconciled until the white wife repents? That's madness. No, we can say, certainly, I can repent for sins I've committed against you and be reconciled to you, but if I walk into a church and see a black brother in Christ, or a Hispanic sister in Christ, or an Asian, I can say, you're my brother, my siblings, because of Christ. So, that's [unintelligible]. You start hearing that, well, we can't have reconciliation till there's repentance and justice. Well, what about Jesus? Aren't we all one in Christ already?

Then finally, when you hear these repeated confessions of blindness, like well, you know, I can't really tell you about racism because I'm just a straight white male. I can't tell you about sexism because...well, wait a minute: Are you a pastor? Is your authority coming from God's word or from your skin color, or your gender, or your sexual orientation? So, when you start hearing things, like, well I can't explain these things because of who I am, my social location. Now wait a minute, are we going to hang our reliance on the Bible? And does that invest the pastor and the Christian with authority? Or are we going to defer to, again, your social standing, your demographic group?

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So, all those things; demanding corporate repentance, insisting that reconciliation depends on justice, and third is, confessing your blindness. Those are all signs that these ideas are seeping into your church. Now, lastly, don't freak out. And you hear buzzwords, you hear social justice, you hear intersectionality, when you hear those words, even hear these ideas, don't freak out. Buy your pastor coffee. Say, what did you mean by that? Ask him, where did you hear these ideas? Have you considered these other arguments? So, I don't want people to go around, like, looking at it as a witch hunt. I want you to enter into dialogue before you, again, [unintelligible] oh my gosh, my church is Marxist.

Frank:

Neil, let's just spend a couple of minutes, anyway, on what the church positively can do, however, to improve race relations. We know that critical theory is not the way to go. It's unbiblical. They do have some things right. One of the things they have right is, there has been racism. So, what can we do to actually improve the situation between whites and blacks and other people in the church?

Neil:

One big thing is dialogue. I'm going to plug my friend, Professor George Yancey's book, *Beyond Racial Gridlock*.

Frank:

Yeah, you have a great review of that on your website. I encourage people to read that book, or read, at least, the review. You could read the book, as well. George Yancey's book, *Beyond Racial Gridlock*.

Neil:

And his model is all based on dialogue, because we need to listen to each other. Because there are people that have been hurt by racism, there's mistrust, and we're brothers and sisters in Christ, that needs to come first. And then we can have hard and honest conversations about things like race, racism, sexism, abuse, all these topics. But his model, his book, is grounded in the idea that we're all sinners, so no one has a free pass to just let it all hang out and do what they feel like, because we all need our brothers and sisters in Christ to keep us accountable to Scripture, to listen, to push us, to press us. So, I think that's a better model than having, just,

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you know, whatever group has the most grievances to just, you know, shout at everyone else. We need to all say, hey, I am a sinner, I have hurt people, and how can we make it right as a family. That's number one.

And two is humility. You know, a lot of times, too, one thing that people often appreciate is, in my talks, I go into detail about our terrible racial past. It was terrible. You read about lynchings and slavery. And it's awful. And a lot of times, what I found, African American Christians will come up to me after the talk and say, thank you. Thank you for hearing what we're saying. And I can understand your concerns. But I can hear them more because you're hearing my concerns.

Frank:

Right.

Neil:

I mean, don't be afraid to read critical theorists, or people like Ibram X. Kendi, and listen to what they're saying. And even if you disagree with them...be critical, definitely. But oftentimes, they'll make you appreciate sides of history you haven't heard.

And then, finally, we should find unity around the gospel. Right? That's what creates the church and brings us together is knowing that we are all sinners who found the one Savior. We're united.

Frank:

Absolutely. Neil, great stuff. I wish we had more time but we're about out of time. Give our listeners and viewers your website again and what you have up there.

Neil:

So, ShenviApologetics.com. And, actually, if you go to my Twitter account, Neil Shenvi, I post on Twitter too much. But you'll be able to keep abreast of all the things that I'm writing. So, Neil Shenvi on Twitter.

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Frank:

Great stuff, Neil. Thank you so much. And Merry Christmas to everybody. We have a lot to be thankful for even in a difficult year. So, make sure you thank the Lord for bringing you this far through this year. And we pray 2021 will be better. And Lord willing, I'll see you again here next week. God bless you all. See you then.

Ad:

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