

## Is It Wrong for Christians to Call Out Shepherds?

(August 30, 2024)

Ladies and gentlemen, is it ever wrong to call out a shepherd, someone who is theologically conservative, a pastor, a teacher, even just a brother or sister? Are you supposed to call someone out? Well, as you may know, we've done a few programs with Megan Basham. Her new book, 'Shepherds for Sale' has created quite a controversy.

And after the first podcast we did with Megan, I got this note from a pastor by the name of Danny, and he says this. I am a regular listener to CrossExamined and often buy books of your guests. I love Frank's ministry. However, the Megan Basham podcast on 'Shepherds for Sale' was very disappointing. I am a conservative pastor that preaches through the Bible and have dealt with all the hot topics in culture during my ministry.

I felt the attack on Tim Keller was very distasteful. Tim taught the Bible faithfully in New York in a way that engaged the culture and won thousands to Christ. Tim never ducked the hard stuff. The tone of Megan and the know it all attitude would turn me away from Christ if I was not a follower of Jesus. Attacking someone that is deceased was cowardly and demonstrated a lack of integrity.

Quite frankly, if local pastors hammered their congregations and communities with the approach Megan demonstrated on the podcast, no one would be reached for Christ. Finally, if Tim Keller took the approach at Redeemer that you suggest, we would not even know his name. An apology for the tone of the podcast should be issued by CrossExamined, faithful listener Dr. Danny.

Now, Danny, let me say this. I loved Tim Keller. In fact, I listened to him more than any other pastor. I still listen to Tim Keller because I think his insights on the scriptures, and particularly for that New York audience, which may lean skeptical, I thought he was perfect. He was very well read. He always would bring in the arts and psychology and other aspects into his sermons that would meet people where they are.



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So, I thought he was great for that culture. But here is my question. Was Tim Keller infallible? Could he have been wrong on something? I mean, who is our authority? We have a problem here. We have a problem with celebrity because that has drifted into the church. And Danny, I'm not saying you're a victim of this. I'm simply saying in a general sense, we have the problem of celebrity, and we also have the problem of the seeker or attractive model of the church because it creates problems.

It may have some advantages, but it does create problems. And I think we all have to admit that none of us are perfect in the sense we get everything correct. I just said Tim Keller was perfect. What I meant was he was very good for that culture in New York. But I still think that his approach had some negatives to it.

And I'm going to unpack them here on the program because I think it's important. And no one is infallible. We are not the standard. I am certainly not the standard. Neither is Tim Keller, Martin Luther, Andy Stanley, J.D. Graeer, Billy Graham, Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, or anyone besides Jesus and the Apostles as expressed in the Bible.

And before we get into this about talking about some maybe negative things that believers in Christ either say or do, whether they're pastors or not, I want to go back to an article I wrote about a year ago. It's on our YouTube. Not our YouTube, it's on our, it's on our website, CrossExamined.org. We'll put it in the show notes.

It had to do with the 'He Gets Us' campaign. And do we have a right, or should we criticize false teachers? And let me start out, I'll just read a couple of few paragraphs of this because it pertains to what we're talking about here. I once got an angry email from a lady who didn't like the fact that I criticized a false teacher on this very podcast. And she wrote me, and she said, you shouldn't criticize other teachers.

Now, do you see the problem with this, ladies and gentlemen? There she was criticizing me, another Christian, while claiming, you ought not criticize other Christians. To paraphrase Elon Musk, if irony could kill, she'd be dead right now. Now, apparently, she never considered that Jesus spent much of his time criticizing the false teachers and practices of the religious politicians known as the Pharisees, whose hearts were far from God.

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He also warned people who led believers astray. If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea, He said, this is recorded in Matthew 18:6. I go on to say this. Paul exposed five false teachers by name in his letters to Timothy. He also warned that, "The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.

Instead, to suit their desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." That's 2 Timothy 4. He also told the Romans at the very end of the Book of Romans to "Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

For such people are not serving the Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naive people." That's Romans 16:17-18. Now, notice this is critical, ladies and gentlemen. Notice that the people causing divisions in this passage are not those defending the truth, but those who are introducing the false teachings.

Now, before I go any further, I'm not saying that Tim Keller was a false teacher. I'm going to get into that in a minute. I will say, however, that a couple of things he said and did I think were wrong, and I'll get into it. But let me continue with what I wrote in this column, this blog post about criticizing or calling out false teachers or even brothers who are Christians.

I say, in fact, every writer of the New Testament warned against false teachers at some point. Peter said that, false teachers, unquote, would introduce, "destructive heresies that promise people freedom while they themselves are slaves to depravity." That's 2 Peter 2.

John wrote, "dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." That's 1 John 4. The writer of Hebrews told us to, "not be carried away by strange teachings." That's Hebrews 13:9.

Jude said, we need to contend for the faith because, "ungodly people pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ as our only sovereign and Lord." That's

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Jude, three to five. James cautioned us about becoming teachers because teachers will be judged more strictly. That's James 3:1. And we could go on and on and on.

In fact, in one sense, the entire Bible is one long warning to avoid false teachings and practices. Yet somehow modern people are under the impression that it is a bigger sin to warn people of false teaching than to actually be a false teacher. Okay, that was a section from a blog post we'll put in the show notes that I wrote a couple of years ago, about a year ago.

But you're saying, okay, Frank, those are false teachers. What about someone like Tim Keller, who was clearly a believer and a theologically conservative pastor? Is it ever right to call out a brother when he is wrong? And here's my answer. Why not? Do you want people to believe falsehoods?

In fact, Peter was called out by Paul in Galatians, chapter two. Here is one apostle calling out another apostle for practicing something he shouldn't have been practicing. You can read Galatians 2 to see what this is. But Paul basically told Peter, he said, I told Peter to his face that he was wrong for trying to get these New Testament believers to obey the Old Testament laws, these Old Testament practices like circumcision and the dietary laws.

Paul is correcting another apostle in the Bible. By the way, this is another embarrassing piece of testimony that nobody would ever invent if they were trying to pass off a lie as the truth. This must have really happened. Why would you have Paul rebuking what people now think to be the first pope Peter if it never happened, they're not making this up.

So, where do we go from here? Because Dr. Danny writes in and says, says that Tim never ducked the hard stuff. Tim Keller. I disagree. And I'll tell you why right after the break. This is not to pick on Tim Keller. It's just to point out that we need to be truthful in what we say and do and call it out in others when they get something wrong. I'm back in two minutes. Don't go anywhere.

Welcome back to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek on the American Family Radio network website, CrossExamined.org. We got a lot coming up, ladies and gentlemen. Before we get back to our topic here, we've got 'Train Your Brain' and 'Why I

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Still Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist.' Two online courses starting next week, September 9.

If you're listening to this afterwards, you can still enroll. In fact, we have two 'Train Your Brain' tracks. This is on logic, one for six to 8th graders and the other for everybody else. And then I'll be teaching 'Why I Still Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist' to high school and college students. And we'll have several live Zooms together for that. Same thing with 'Train Your Brain.' Don't forget.

Also, we're going to Egypt and Saudi Arabia in December. We're going to climb the real Mount Sinai. The website has all of the details. And coming up, beginning next week, we're going to be at UT Dallas. Then we're going to be at Calvary Chapel, Tucson. Then we're going to be at Arizona State, then Western Carolina University here, not far from Asheville, North Carolina.

And then the Unshaken conference with Alisa Childers, Natasha Crain, and myself in Buffalo. That's September 20. So, we've got UT Dallas on the fifth, Calvary Chapel on the 6th with my friend Charlie Kirk and Robert Furrow, then Arizona state on the 9th, Western Carolina on the 18th, Unshaken on the 20th of September. Keep all that in mind if you're anywhere near any of those places. Love to see you. Go to our website for more.

All right, let me now go back to the topic that we're talking about today. Should we ever call out somebody who is a believer, somebody who is a great preacher like Tim Keller, if he gets something wrong? And let me be honest about this. I don't like to do this. When I get corrected, I don't like it either. But I'm not perfect. Tim Keller wasn't perfect.

We all get things wrong on occasion and it's a tough problem, especially with friends. Now I've only had Tim Keller on the program once. He wasn't a friend of mine, but I always enjoyed him. And sometimes I struggle with what does it mean to be a loyal friend? If you do know somebody who is, say, your own pastor or somebody you know who is a prominent teacher?

Well, it can't mean approval. Love doesn't mean approval. It can't mean I'm going to give this person so much leeway that they're going to continue to teach false things. And I'm not going

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to say anything, but it can mean I'm going to give this person the benefit of any doubt I have until I can talk to them personally. If I can talk to them personally.

Sometimes, obviously you can. If the person's a public figure and you don't know them, you can't do that. You can just state what you think the false teaching was. But if you know them, you could go to them privately at first, as Matthew 18 lays out. And you don't have to call everything out. You don't have to call out issues that are not essential.

You know, Romans 14 issues, minor issues. You can let people have different opinions on that kind of thing. That's fine. Paul talks about it in Romans 14. But you do need to call out things which are important. And Dr. Danny pointed out that he was upset that Megan Basham said some negative things about Tim Keller, about some of the things he said that appeared to be in violation of what the Bible said, arguably, anyway, or some of what he said was buying into leftist political talking points which also contradicted the Bible.

Now, Pastor Danny wrote in and said, Tim never ducked the hard stuff. I hate to say this because as I say, I love Tim Keller. I listen to him more than anyone. But I think there are two ways, in my opinion, Tim Keller ducked the hard stuff. Number one, by failing to discuss the tough cultural issues that the Bible is clear on, such as abortion and homosexuality.

And he failed to do this from the pulpit for years, ladies and gentlemen. And secondly, by trying to equate laws on abortion with laws on helping the poor, you know, life and death issues with welfare laws. I'll get to the second one later if we have enough time in this podcast in this radio program. But let me start with the first one about failing to discuss the tough cultural issues.

I don't know if you've ever heard of a lady by the name of Kirsten Powers. She was an atheist who for years was on Fox News, then she was on CNN. She may still be on CNN, I don't know. But she attended Keller's church, and she wrote this piece right after Tim's death, which was in May of 2023. And I'm going to read some of this piece, not all of it. Again, we'll put the link in the show notes if you want to read all of it. It's very well written.

And I think she nails how good Tim Keller was on so many things. But she had a problem, and it's the same problem I have. Here's what she wrote. Again, Kirsten Powers. She said, Tim

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Keller, one of American Christianity's giants, passed away this week at age 72. This was in May of 2023. As some of you may know, I somewhat improbably spent years in the evangelical fold starting in 2005 following the sudden death of my father at age 61 and the passing of my beloved grandmother the year after.

It's hard to imagine that I would have headed down this road, but for Tim Keller. I entered Tim's church, Redeemer Presbyterian, as a fairly committed atheist. I had long ago dispatched with my episcopalian upbringing and other than my boyfriend, who brought me to church, there were very few religious people in my Manhattan friend group, which consisted primarily of people working in or dedicated to democratic politics. Sunday was for brunch, not church.

A year later, I was all in with Christianity, and not just any Christianity. I had signed up for Tim Keller's brand of evangelical Christianity, or at least what I thought was Tim Keller's brand of evangelicalism. My feelings about Tim Keller the person are straightforward. I knew him to be a thoughtful, brilliant, kind person, a devoted husband and father, humble and generous.

I was often the beneficiary of his wisdom as I navigated various issues. His wife Kathy, just as brilliant as he was my Bible study teacher for years. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm getting choked up reading this because I agree with her. Tim Keller and Kathy Keller were just wonderful people.

Anyway, she goes on, they were intertwined. Heart, mind, and soul. It's hard to imagine the grief she is experiencing as she faces life without him. What was it that was so alluring about Tim? David Brooks does a good job of capturing it. Now, David Brooks is a columnist for the New York Times, and here's what he wrote about Tim Keller. And I think David Brooks is exactly right about Keller.

Here's what he said. American evangelicalism suffers from an intellectual inferiority complex that sometimes turns into straight anti-intellectualism. But Tim could draw on a vast array of intellectual resources to argue for the existence of God, to draw piercing psychological insights from the troubling parts of Scripture, or to help people through moments of suffering.

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His voice was warm, his observations crystal clear. We all tried to act cool around Tim, but we knew we had a giant in our midst. He didn't fight a culture war against that Manhattan world. His focus was not on politics, but on our own disordered hearts, racked by inordinate desires for things that control us, that lead us to feel superior and exclude those from them, that fail to satisfy us, even when we get them.

In fact, that last part was a quote from Keller. Okay, that's from David Brooks. And Kirsten Powers goes on to say it was his focus on the eternal issues of life, the issues of meaning, that really hooked me. Nowhere else was anybody I knew talking about these things in the way that Tim was. He illustrated his points through philosophy, art, pop culture, and, yes, the Bible.

But it was a Bible I had never been introduced to, despite attending church and Sunday school every weekend of my childhood, he brought it alive and showed how it was actually relevant to my life. So, why are my feelings complicated? Remember this title of this is 'My Complicated Feelings About Tim Keller.' And again, this is written right after he died.

Miss Powers goes on to say, ultimately, evangelicalism ended up being quite harmful to me and to many people I care about. And I can't imagine I would ever have signed up for it, but for Tim's expert apologetics. When I say I signed up for Tim Keller's brand of evangelicalism, I mean I signed up for what I heard from the pulpit. And here's a key section, which never included teaching about homosexuality, or abortion being a sin, or men being the head of the family.

But as I became more involved in the church, I learned that these were, in fact, core teachings. It was more through peer pressure than any sermons that I started to conform to, teachings that left me feeling unsettled and confused. Slowly, I lost myself as I attempted to conform to a theology that had the effect of disempowering me and alienating me from myself and many important people in my life. Let me stop right here.

This is a very insightful comment from Kirsten Powers. I lost myself as I attempted to conform to a theology. Exactly. You need to lose yourself to find yourself. You need to lose your life to find your life. That's what Jesus said. And it said it had the effect of disempowering me and alienating me from myself. Exactly.

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It's going to disempower your rebellion. It's going to disempower the fact that you think you're the moral arbiter of the universe. Now, I'm not trying to put words in her mouth here, but it seems to me that that might be what she's saying, because that meant she had to disagree with many important people in her life. As she mentioned earlier, these were probably people in that Manhattan group that were really into democratic politics. I assume many of them identified as LGBTQ.

So, she felt she was being alienated because she loved what Tim Keller said from the pulpit, but she didn't love what the Bible actually said about these issues that were important to her, moral issues: homosexuality, abortion, men being the head of the family. She goes on. I am not alone in my experience, but many people who leave evangelicalism, and really, it's white evangelicalism for the most part. I don't know why she put that in there.

Well, anyway, end up defining themselves in opposition to the world they left. They bring the same religious fervor once marshaled in favor of evangelical theology and deploy it to demonize their former faith community. It is still a paradigm of good versus evil. Only now the evangelicals, or believers in general, are the evil ones. This is a very insightful comment as well.

Those are many of the people that have deconstructed or have gone into progressive Christianity. This is me talking now, not Miss Powers. But now suddenly, the people that believe the Bible are the evil ones because, yeah, they deconstructed their evangelical faith. They don't realize they've reconstructed another faith where they are at the center of life, where their moral declarations everyone must take as gospel.

All right, we have much more. Don't go anywhere. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio network. We're back in just two. Don't go anywhere.

Is it ever right to call out a shepherd, somebody who is a conservative pastor who you think gets something wrong? That's what we're talking about today because we got a question, not so much a question, really a claim that we were being too unkind to Tim Keller. At least Megan Basham was on the first podcast we did, 'Shepherds for Sale.'

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By the way, there are many positive comments about Keller in that book as well. It wasn't all negative, but we're just talking about the negative aspect of it. And I'm reading from an article that Kirsten Powers, who attended Tim Keller's church for a good long while until she realized that many of the controversial moral issues that were never spoken of from the pulpit, she didn't agree with.

And so, she ultimately left the church after she felt she had been sucked into the church by sort of a bait and switch. Anyway, she goes on to say about demonizing the opposition, I understand this impulse, and I fell prey to it for a while, but ultimately it became for me an issue of both/and. I found evangelicalism was both harmful, and it taught me a lot about a life of profound faith.

I would not understand the Bible as deeply as I do had I not spent time at Tim Keller's church and specifically Kathy Keller's Bible study, which was as intellectually rigorous as it was spiritually meaningful. This experience gave me a container for a growing faith at a time I felt very lost. It ultimately wasn't the right container for me, but it provided a place to start.

All right, let me stop right here. You wouldn't think somebody who went to Tim Keller's church would say this. It wasn't ultimately the right container for me, as if religion is just a matter of preference, that it wasn't really the case that Jesus rose from the dead. It's just, well, if you like evangelical Christianity, well, you can be a part of it.

If you don't, you don't need to be. Of course, Tim Keller didn't believe that. Tim Keller believed Christianity was right and true. He has a whole book on it called 'Reason for God.' But we treat, in America, we treat religion as if it's a kind of a cafeteria thing. I'll just take what I like and leave out what I don't like. It's a preference.

It's not really true. That's what people think. Anyway, here's what Kirsten goes on to say, while I do not consider myself a particularly religious person anymore, I still view the Bible as a rich source of spiritual wisdom. And white evangelicals get a lot wrong in my opinion. They get one major thing right. They understand there is a spiritual dimension to life, and they take that seriously.

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Then she goes on to talk about Richard Rohr. And I don't have time to read everything that she said here about Richard Rohr, but this is the direction people go in when they leave evangelical Christianity. I want spirituality, but I don't want moral accountability. And Richard Rohr is all about that. Or we're going to make up our own morals. And again, that's what Richard Rohr does.

And if you want more on Richard Rohr, my colleague Alisa Childers talks a lot about him because he is part of the progressive Christianity movement. And her book, 'Another Gospel,' and the other book she wrote called 'Live Your Truth and Other Lies' goes into this in detail as well. Anyway, she talks about how complicated her relationship has become with evangelicalism and the fact that she loved Tim and Kathy Keller, but she didn't like the fact that these moral issues she didn't agree with. And she ends her column by saying, rest in peace, Tim Keller.

Now, Mark Tooley writes about it this way. And I'll put the article he wrote in the show notes as well. He's quoting from another article that Kirsten wrote. And Kirsten, well, here's how he starts. CNN political analyst Kirsten Powers complains about Christian groups that aren't upfront about their controversial views.

As Powers recalls, she was then years ago, a lapsed agnostic Episcopalian who went to Keller's church to please her boyfriend. She describes this church this way. Long story short, it was an evangelical church that sought to be seeker friendly. They led with all the good stuff. Jesus was an immigrant, a radical when it came to treating women equally and a champion of the downtrodden.

It was intellectually stimulating format, including sermons that were laced with poetry, art references, philosophy, and pop culture. I was intrigued to say the least. Then it says Powers became very involved in the church and only later did she realize the conservative theology. Here's what she said. If the day I walked into that Upper East side church service, the pastor had given a sermon calling homosexuality a sin or said women should submit to their husbands, I would have gotten up and walked out.

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I only learned that these were the core teachings after I had been attending a year and a half and was in too deep. Abortion was never discussed from the pulpit, at least to my knowledge. But once I started asking, I found out the church community was fairly homogeneous in their anti-abortion beliefs, a view that the pastor expressed publicly many years after I left the church. Powers calls the secretiveness a red flag and complains that seeker movements hide what they really are.

Let me agree, a lot of times we do. Powers said this. Instead, they, "focus on things that will draw people in and that, ironically, ultimately play a tiny role in the church's overall ministry. Powers claims that the controversial views were only revealed casually after new believers are already embedded in the community and feeling at that point, it's almost, quote, impossible to leave."

"And the church people at this church, Powers admits, were nice people who generally wanted to save souls. They were also educated, sophisticated, intellectual, credentialed, and liked to distinguish themselves from the, 'intolerant, unsophisticated, overly politicized brand of evangelicals outside of the major metro areas." Oh, gee, there's a bit of a pharisee attitude there, isn't it?

Now here's the problem, ladies and gentlemen, and I'm going to read again from Dr. Danny's question or statement that we made at the top of the program, who wrote in to say that he was upset with how Megan characterized Tim Keller. Dr. Danny said this, quite frankly, if local pastors hammered their congregations and communities with the approach Megan demonstrated on the podcast, no one would be reached for Christ.

All right, I said this on the last podcast. This is the problem with assuming the church is for unbelievers. It's not. Go to Ephesians 4. The church is there to equip the saints to do ministry. It's not that the pastor is supposed to be bringing everybody to Jesus. The people in the pews are supposed to do that. And the pastor and his staff are supposed to help prepare you to do that. Yes, we want to be welcoming church. Yes, we want to welcome unbelievers into church.

But we should not be sacrificing the truth in order to attract people to the church. Are we attracting people to Jesus or are we attracting them to what they want to hear? Go back to 2

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Timothy. People are just going to put teachers around them to tell them what their itching ears want to hear. We don't want to have bait in church, or I shouldn't bait in church. We don't have bait and switch. And that's what Kirsten Powers is complaining of.

It was bait and switch. I mean, the sexual issues and abortion, they're all over the news all the time and you never talk about them. For years? Now, I understand you don't have to lead with this all the time, but here is the problem with the attractional model, with the seeker sensitive model. When do you talk about the controversial issues? If you're always going to say I might offend somebody, somebody might be here for the first time. I can't bring it up.

You're never going to bring it up. That's the problem. You're never going to do it. You can't be dictated about, or you can't be controlled by what someone in the pews might think. You should be controlled by what the scripture says. And if we don't get that right, ladies and gentlemen, we're not doing church. We may be doing an evangelical meeting, we may be doing a crusade to get people to walk down the aisle, but we're not making them disciples.

Jesus didn't say make believers, He said make disciples. So, I hate to tell you this, Dr. Danny, and again, I hate to say this because I love Tim Keller, but I think he got this thing wrong. If you're never going to talk about these issues from the pulpit, I don't think you're doing your job as a pastor. Now, what's the second thing that in my opinion he got wrong? He ducked the hard stuff. The second thing is, he tried to do... And this is not just Tim Keller. I mean, there are many high profile pastors that avoid these issues and just don't want to talk about them.

But here's the second thing. He tried to equate laws on abortion with laws on helping the poor. In other words, he tried to equate life and death laws with welfare laws. Tim Keller repeatedly said, correctly, that neither political party had everything right according to Christianity. That's true, but there is still a big moral difference between the two party platforms.

By equating abortion policy with welfare policy, Dr. Keller was incorrectly saying it's a wash between the parties because the Republicans have abortion right and the Democrats have helping the poor right in his opinion. So, it's a wash, ladies and gentlemen. This is the same thing leftists do when they say you're only really pro-life if you agree with all their social programs. They make an invalid comparison when they say this.

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In fact, here's what Tim Keller did in a series of tweets in April of 2022. I'm not going to read them all, but I'll put the link to them in the show notes if you want to read them all. Here's the essence of what he said. He said, the Bible tells us that idolatry, abortion, and ignoring the poor are all grievous sins, but it doesn't tell us exactly how we are to apply these norms to a pluralistic democracy.

I know abortion is a sin, but the Bible doesn't tell me the best political policy to decrease or end abortion in this country, nor which political or legal policies are most effective to that end. We are allowed to debate, and so our churches should not have disunity over debatable political differences. Okay, let me just replace one word in what he said.

I'm going to replace abortion with murder and see how this sounds to you. The Bible tells us that idolatry, murder, and ignoring the poor are all grievous sins, but it doesn't tell us exactly how we are to apply these norms to our pluralistic society. I know murder is a sin, but the Bible doesn't tell me the best political policy to decrease or end murder in this country, nor which political or legal policies are most effective to that end. We are allowed to debate that.

And so, our churches should not have disunity over debatable political differences. Ladies and gentlemen, does that seem right to you? Do you think we should debate whether or not we ought to have a law against murder? Please? We're going to unpack this further right after the break.

You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, talking about one of my favorite preachers, Tim Keller. But I've got to call it like I think it is. Back in just two minutes. Don't go anywhere.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. We're talking today about, I think, a mistake that many evangelical pastors seem to make. And in this case, Tim Keller made it explicit a couple of years ago when he tried to say that laws against abortion were just like laws that help the poor, and so we can agree to disagree.

And I think what was going on here was Keller was confusing the government's responsibility to prevent evil with their responsibility to promote good. The government's main role is to

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prevent evil and punish evildoers. You can just look at Romans 13:4 for that. You know where Paul says, the leader doesn't bear the sword for nothing.

In other words, the leader, the government has the sword of punishment to protect innocent people from evil. And that's why, by the way, ladies and gentlemen, most laws tell people what they can't do rather than what they must do. Outlawing murder is the primary responsibility of government. It's necessary. As James Madison put it, if men were angels, no government would be necessary.

We need a government to prevent people from murdering one another. That's the primary purpose of government and to hurt one another. The secondary responsibility of government is to promote the good. And government certainly has a role in doing that with regard to the poor. For example, while ancient Israel had no government welfare programs, God instructed farmers in Israel to leave the corners of their fields for the poor. That's Leviticus 23:22.

And the Bible also commands people to be generous to the poor. You can look at Proverbs 22:9, Galatians 2:10, Acts 20:35. Plenty of verses on that. Be generous to the poor. But here is the key difference between preventing murder and helping the poor. We all know the best way to prevent murder is to have a law against it with severe penalties.

If we don't prevent murder, nothing else matters, including helping the poor. The right to life is the right to all other rights. If you don't have life, you don't have anything, you don't exist. But there are many ways of helping the poor. In other words, helping the poor is an ends and means issue that we can debate what approach works best. But murder is not an ends and means issue. On the poor issue, we might ask ourselves the question, do welfare programs work best or does expanding economic opportunities through tax breaks and other incentives work best?

Should we leave it to the private sector, particularly the churches like we used to? Or is there some combination of those three approaches that would work best? That's debatable.

Although, ladies and gentlemen, if you look at the results, after 60 years of the welfare state, where more than a trillion dollars has been spent, the poverty rate hasn't changed at all. But

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the intact family rate has dramatically declined. Crime has soared, and more people than ever are dependent on government. This is hardly a success story.

So, for even Keller to suggest the Democrats have welfare right doesn't meet with the results. And it doesn't meet with the Bible, which I'll get to here in a few minutes. In other words, not every law or issue is of equal importance. I don't have time to go through all the passages here, but the Bible talks about the greatest commandment, which implies there are lesser commandments. It talks about greater love, greater sin, greater judgment.

In fact, Jesus talks about all these things. He talks about greater knowledge, will lead to greater punishment. To whom much is given, much will be required. He also talks about not neglecting the more important matters of the law, and He's telling that to politicians, Pharisees in His day.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, we would be neglecting the more impact... Easy for me to say. [Laughter] Let me start over. We would be neglecting the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy and faithfulness, which Jesus talks about in Matthew 23:23, if we had a great welfare program but allowed murder. What could be more unjust than allowing murder? Allowing murder is a far more serious dereliction of duty for the government than not having the best plan for the poor.

This is the mistake of people who try to dilute or deflect the critical mission of pro-lifers who are trying to save babies from being killed. They try to equate laws that prevent murder with welfare policies that may or may not help the poor. Not everything is equally important. Not everything is immediate life and death like abortion is. Life and death laws and welfare laws are not the same in other words. I mean, think about it. Just practically, what's worse, you get murdered, or your welfare check isn't high enough?

I'm far more guilty if I murder you than if I fail to support you financially the way you want me to. So, we should outlaw murder, obviously. We have to. We should outlaw murder and we should help the poor. But outlawing murder is a primary and obvious responsibility of government, while helping the poor is an ends and means issue that Democrats and Republicans both want to do, but they have different means of getting there.

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And it's not necessarily a government issue because the Bible doesn't tell us, as Keller rightly pointed out, he should have pointed out with regard to helping the poor. He tried to point it out with regard to the abortion issue. He tried to say, well, you know, the Bible doesn't say that we ought to outlaw abortion. It gives us leeway there. No, I think thou shalt not murder is pretty clear. The Bible talks about helping the poor, yes, but it doesn't say the government has that primary responsibility.

Now, I think the Bible does suggest the government ought to do it. So, I'm for that. I'm just simply saying that it's much clearer that the Bible wants us to outlaw murder rather than have a particular welfare policy in place. So, I'm sorry to admit that Tim Keller failed to see this distinction, which is shocking because he was such a smart man. I love Tim Keller, but I think he was wrong about this. And I think Megan Basham merely pointed it out.

And so, by the way, did several other evangelicals at the time. In fact, Stephen Begkis, maybe I'm pronouncing his name wrong at The Christian Post when Tim Keller in 2022 put out these tweets I've mentioned, said this, and again, I'll put this article that Stephen wrote in the show notes. He said, Keller is also wrong when it comes to doctrinal unity. Pastors must be willing to accept disunity and upset members of their congregation to teach the truth about abortion. "The Lord hates hands that shed innocent blood." That's from Proverbs 6:16-17.

"A pastor who refuses to preach against abortion to avoid disunity is not following the example of Christ who came not to bring peace, but a sword.' Matthew 10:34. In fact, let me stop here for just a second. Nobody ever talks about those passages. Jesus said, I didn't come to bring peace. I came to bring a sword. I'm going to divide mother and daughter, father and son.

You never hear people talking about those passages. But many of you listening to me or watching me right now know those passages are true. Why? Because you're divided in your own family over Jesus. You're divided over what he said, and his apostles said on issues, because you are siding with Jesus and the apostles, who are the arbiters here? Particularly God's nature is the arbiter expressed through Jesus.

And your family members aren't the moral arbiters of the universe, and you're rightfully siding with Jesus. You should. He goes on to say. Stephen does. He says, as Paul exhorts Timothy, "the

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Lord's servant must correct his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will." That's 2 Timothy 2.

So, we have to speak up against this, ladies and gentlemen when it happens. We don't overlook what is a primary command of Jesus, and that is to make disciples and also to speak out against this kind of injustice. When hands are shedding innocent blood, we don't just stand by and go that might make somebody upset. Of course it's going to make people upset. Men love darkness rather than light.

As Augustine said, we love the truth when it enlightens us. We hate the truth when it convicts us. Some people are going to get up and walk out of the church. Well, ladies and gentlemen, if they're not going to be able to accept the teachings of the Bible, which they know deep down in their hearts are true, we ought not be dismembering our own children in the womb. They know that's true.

If they're not going to accept child dismemberment, it's unlikely they're going to accept the salvation message either. Apparently, they don't think they've done anything wrong, and they don't think abortion's wrong. Look, you just got to do what's right and leave the results to God.

We're not here to bait and switch people into the kingdom. We're not here to put out an attractional model that only talks about things that are attractive to people because then we're not really saving them to Jesus. We're saving them to themselves, which is no savior at all. As Kirsten Powers, I think, unwittingly swerved into when she said I was losing myself.

Yes, she said slowly I lost myself as I attempted to conform to a theology that had the effect of disempowering me and alienating me for myself and many important people in my life. Yeah, it might. People may not agree with you anymore, but again, love doesn't mean agreement. Love doesn't mean approval. Love means seeking what's best for the other person.

And what's best for the other person is the truth. You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free, if you accept it. What does that imply? If you don't have the truth, you're in

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bondage. You're in bondage to your own opinions. You're in bondage to your own morality. You're in bondage to your own sins. You're in bondage to what other people think about you. You're in bondage not to Jesus, but to what you want to be true.

Now, in the next podcast, I'm going to pick more of this up because Bill Dembski has a lot of great things to say on this. So, in the next podcast, we'll pick it up. In the meantime, don't forget about 'Train Your Brain.' Two courses, one for 6th to 8<sup>th</sup> graders and one for everyone else. Then 'Why I Still Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist', I'm going to be teaching that for high schoolers and college students.

Go to [crossexamined.org](http://crossexamined.org). Click on online courses. You'll see it there. And then don't forget about UT Dallas, Calvary Chapel, Tucson, and Arizona State next week, all on our website. [Crossexamined.org](http://Crossexamined.org). See you here next week, Lord willing.

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