

THE 3D SERIES: DEFENSE, DOCTRINE & DISCERNMENT



SEASON 4: DISCERNMENT

STUDY GUIDE

P.W. Howard, MA, JD



"But solid food is for the mature -- for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14 CSB).

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INTRODUCTION

A. DESCRIPTION OF THE 3D SERIES

THE 3D SERIES: DEFENSE, DOCTRINE & DISCERNMENT is a teaching series for the study of:

- (1) **DEFENSE** - Learn to **spread and defend** the Christian faith. In addition to Jesus' Great Commission to "make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19-20 NASB), the Bible also tells us to "always be[] ready to make a **defense** to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15 NASB);
- (2) **DOCTRINE** - Learn sound **doctrine** to reinforce your own faith and teach it to others (Titus 2:1); and
- (3) **DISCERNMENT** - Use God's Word to **discern** or distinguish the difference between good and evil in our culture (Romans 12:2; Hebrews 5:14).

The overall goal of the 3D Series is to teach Christians to become three-dimensional, mature Christians (Matthew 28:19–20; Ephesians 4:11–15; Colossians 1:28; 2 Timothy 3:16–17).

THE 3D SERIES consists of four Seasons:

Season 1: The Authority of Scripture - Consider what the Bible says about the Bible, what the circumstantial evidence says about the Bible, and how to interpret the Bible.

Season 2: Practical Evangelism & Apologetics - Consider the biblical foundations for spreading and defending the faith and learn evangelism methods and how to answer common objections.

Season 3: Doctrine - Study important biblical doctrines like Biblical Inerrancy, the Trinity, the Deity of Jesus, the Kingdom, etc.

***Season 4: Discernment** - Apply Scripture and sound biblical doctrine to cultural issues of the day.

B. DESIGN PHILOSOPHY OF THE 3D SERIES

1. Easy to Participate: Read Along, Ongoing & Cyclical

This study guide is designed for read-along use in classes and groups. There is no homework and no prerequisites.

The teacher or group leader simply reads (or asks others to read) a section together, pausing for questions and discussion as they arise.

Sections may take one meeting or several, depending on the depth of discussion.

The goal is sound doctrine saturation, not pages covered per week.

Though all of the Seasons are related and build upon each other, each Season can stand alone. This allows anyone to jump in at the beginning of any particular Season and proceed through the next Seasons until they have finished the cycle.

For example, if you missed **Season 1: The Authority of the Bible**, you can start with Season 2 and go all the way through Season 4, and then go to Season 1 when the cycle starts over again.

2. Practical Information

The 3D Series gives practical information to help mature your own faith and to help you spread and defend that faith.

Though many volumes have been written about the topics covered in this series, The 3D Series is not meant to be an exhaustive academic endeavor. It is meant to be practical.

3. Sources

The primary source material for The 3D Series is God's Word. Other sources include relatively recent volumes regarding evangelism and apologetics in general, as well as other theological studies like systematic theology textbooks.

The 3D Series does not reinvent the wheel, nor does it add to or subtract from Scripture. The 3D Series simply attempts to build a solid foundation upon which you can build over time from other sources and your own experience.

4. Simplified Citations

Since this Study Guide is not intended to be an academic work, the citations to sources will be simplified, but sufficient to allow you to find them on the Internet.

C. COMPLETING THE 3D SERIES

This fourth Season completes THE 3D SERIES: DEFENSE, DOCTRINE & DISCERNMENT. Each Season builds upon the others and leads naturally to discernment.

Season 1 - The Authority of the Bible asked, What is our standard?

It established that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16–17). If we're going to determine what is true or false, good or evil, we need a reliable standard. And that standard is the Bible.

Season 2 - Practical Evangelism & Apologetics asked, What do we do with the truth?

We spread it and defend it. Jesus commands us to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19 CSB), and Peter tells believers to always be ready to make a defense for the hope within them (1 Pet. 3:15).

Season 3 - Doctrine asked, What does the Bible teach?

In Titus 2:1 (NASB), Paul instructed: “But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.” Christians need to know what Scripture teaches about God, Jesus Christ, humanity, sin, salvation, the Church, the Kingdom, and other important doctrines so that we can recognize and refute error (Titus 1:9; 2 Tim. 4:3–4).

Season 4 - Discernment asks, How do we apply biblical truth to the world around us?

That's where everything comes together. In Season 4 we'll learn to apply Scripture to the ideas, movements, arguments, technologies, moral questions, and cultural issues we encounter.

The goal is to help you learn how to think biblically about whatever issue may arise.

Cultures change. Political movements come and go. Technologies develop. Words are redefined and accepted beliefs change. But God's Word doesn't:

(Isa. 40:8 NASB) “The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”

So the progression of THE 3D SERIES is simple:

Authority gives us the standard of truth.
Defense prepares us to spread and defend the truth.
Doctrine teaches us the truth.
Discernment teaches us to apply the truth.

We can't discern biblically without accepting Scripture's authority, knowing sound doctrine, and recognizing when biblical truth is being challenged. And once we know what God has said, we're responsible for what we do with it.

I. WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT DISCERNMENT

A. WHAT IS DISCERNMENT?

Biblical discernment is the ability to distinguish truth from error, wisdom from foolishness, and good from evil according to God's Word.

1. Discernment Is Part of Christian Maturity

The key passage for Season 4 is Hebrews 5:14. Consider it in context:

(Heb. 5:11–14 NASB) “Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. **But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.**”

Hebrews contrasts immature Christians who still need “milk” with mature Christians whose senses are “trained to discern good and evil.” Discernment is therefore part of Christian maturity and develops as we learn and practice God's Word.

Paul likewise connects maturity with discernment:

(Phil. 1:9–11 CSB) “And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment, so that you may approve the things that are superior and may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.”

Biblical love isn't blind approval. Paul wanted Christian love to grow in “knowledge and every kind of discernment” so that believers could recognize what is superior.

2. Discernment Requires Wisdom From God

Solomon understood the importance of discernment when he became king:

(1 Kings 3:9 KJV) “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?”

Rather than primarily asking for riches, power, or long life, Solomon asked for wisdom to “discern between good and bad,” and God was pleased with his request (1 Kings 3:10–12).

James similarly tells us:

(James 1:5 CSB) “Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him.”

We shouldn’t depend entirely upon our own understanding. We should pray for God’s wisdom as we seek to understand and apply His Word.

3. Discernment Requires the Work of the Holy Spirit

Paul writes:

(1 Cor. 2:14–16 NASB) “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For ‘who has known the mind of the Lord, that He will instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”

Christians don’t become discerning merely because they’re intelligent. Spiritual discernment comes from God as the Holy Spirit works through the Word He inspired.

4. Discernment Develops Through Practice

Hebrews 5:14 says mature believers have their senses trained “because of practice.”

Discernment therefore develops as we study Scripture, pray for wisdom, submit our thinking to God, and repeatedly apply biblical truth.

Biblical discernment involves knowing God’s Word, relying upon the Holy Spirit, praying for wisdom, and practicing what God teaches until we increasingly distinguish truth from error and good from evil.

B. DISTINGUISHING GOOD FROM EVIL

Biblical discernment requires Christians to distinguish what God calls good from what He calls evil. That can become difficult when our desires or the surrounding culture influence how we think.

1. God Defines Good and Evil, Not Culture

Isaiah warned:

(Isa. 5:20 CSB) “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”

Fallen people can become so confused that what God calls evil is renamed good, while what He calls good is condemned as evil. We often convince ourselves that wrong is actually right.

2. What Seems Right Can Still Be Wrong

Proverbs warns:

(Prov. 14:12 NASB) “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

Sincerity doesn’t determine truth. Our judgment can be distorted by sin, ignorance, pride, emotion, habit, and the influence of others.

The Book of Judges repeatedly illustrates this danger. As Israel moved farther from God’s Word, the book describes the growing moral and spiritual disorder with a repeated statement:

(Judg. 21:25 NASB) “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

The problem wasn’t that everyone was deliberately trying to do what he believed was evil. People were increasingly deciding for themselves what was “right” rather than submitting to what God had revealed. The result was idolatry, sexual immorality, violence, injustice, and social chaos (Judg. 17–21).

That is exactly the danger of making our own judgment the final standard. Something may appear right to us while actually contradicting God.

A statement commonly attributed to Charles Spurgeon says: “Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right.”

Obvious evil is usually easier to recognize. It’s more dangerous when an idea contains enough truth to sound right while quietly contradicting Scripture. That is why Proverbs says:

(Prov. 3:5–7 NASB) “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil.”

Notice the repeated warning about what is right “in his own eyes” and being “wise in your own eyes” (Judg. 21:25; Prov. 3:7).

Biblical discernment requires humility. Our first impression, personal preference, cultural assumption, or even a belief we’ve held for years may be wrong when measured against God’s Word.

The question isn’t simply, “Does this seem right to me?” The question is, “Is it right according to God’s Word?”

3. Christians Must Reject Evil and Hold to Good

Paul writes:

(Rom. 12:9 CSB) “Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good.”

We can’t obey that command unless we can distinguish evil from good.

Biblical love also doesn’t require approving everything another person believes or does. Paul tells us:

(Eph. 4:15 NASB) “[B]ut speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ...”

Truth and love belong together. Love doesn’t require compromising truth, and truth should be communicated with genuine love.

4. God’s Word Gives Us Understanding

The Psalmist wrote:

(Ps. 119:104 KJV) “Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.”

God’s Word gives understanding that enables us to recognize falsehood. A few verses later, it is written:

(Ps. 119:105 NASB) “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

As a lamp exposes what darkness hides, Scripture gives light for moral and spiritual questions.

5. Jesus Commands Righteous, Not Hypocritical, Judgment

Jesus commanded:

(John 7:24 CSB) “Stop judging according to outward appearances; rather judge according to righteous judgment.”

Jesus didn’t prohibit all moral judgment. He commanded “righteous judgment.”

This is important because Matthew 7:1 is often used to claim Christians must never judge. But consider the larger passage:

(Matt. 7:1–6 NASB) “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of

your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

Here, Jesus was condemning hypocritical judgment, not all judgment. He says to remove the log from our own eye so that we can then "see clearly" to help our brother.

In other words, it takes non-hypocritical "righteous judgment" (John 7:24 CSB) to determine who the dogs and the hogs are.

6. Jesus Commands Us to Recognize False Teachers

Jesus warned:

(Matt. 7:15–20 CSB) "Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So you'll recognize them by their fruit."

Jesus twice says, "you'll recognize them by their fruit." That requires examining teaching and conduct and reaching conclusions.

The Bible therefore doesn't command Christians to suspend moral judgment. It commands us to judge humbly, righteously, and according to God's standard.

Throughout this study, the controlling question will therefore be: **What does the Bible say?**

C. TESTING EVERYTHING BY GOD'S WORD

Biblical discernment doesn't require Christians to accept everything they hear or reject everything automatically. Scripture commands us to test what we encounter and hold firmly to what is good.

1. Christians Are Commanded to Test What We Hear

Paul wrote:

(1 Thess. 5:21–22 NASB) "[E]xamine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil."

That gives us the basic pattern: test what we hear, hold fast to what is good, and reject what is evil. The ultimate purpose of discernment is to determine the truth.

2. Spiritual Claims Must Be Tested

John similarly commanded:

(1 John 4:1–3 CSB) “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming; even now it is already in the world.”

Something isn’t true merely because someone claims it came from God. False teachers often use religious language, quote Scripture, speak about Jesus, and sound sincere. Spiritual claims must be tested against what God has already revealed in the Bible.

3. Even Respected Teachers Should Be Tested by Scripture

The Bereans provide a clear example:

(Acts 17:10–12 NASB) “The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.”

The Bereans eagerly received Paul’s message while still “examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”

If they were commended for testing Paul’s teaching, no human teacher should be above biblical examination. A pastor, professor, author, politician, scientist, commentator, or activist can be knowledgeable and still be wrong.

4. No Teacher Has Authority to Contradict God’s Word

Paul wrote:

(Gal. 1:8–9 KJV) “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”

Paul establishes the gospel as the standard so firmly that even an apostle or “an angel from heaven” must be rejected if he proclaims another gospel. Truth doesn’t become true because an impressive or powerful person says it. The message itself must be tested by Scripture.

5. Human Ideas Must Be Measured Against Christ

Paul warned:

(Col. 2:8 NASB) “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

Paul isn’t condemning careful thinking or useful knowledge. Human philosophy, science, history, economics, medicine, psychology, technology, and other fields can provide valuable facts.

But human beings are fallible. No human authority may overrule what God has clearly revealed.

At the same time, Scripture doesn’t provide every technical fact involved in every modern question. Biblical discernment therefore requires both the right biblical rule and accurate facts to which that rule is applied.

6. God’s Word Is the Standard of Truth

Jesus prayed to the Father:

(John 17:17 KJV) “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”

We don’t measure Scripture by our opinions. We must measure our opinions by Scripture. But Scripture must also be interpreted correctly. Paul instructed Timothy:

(2 Tim. 2:15 NASB) “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”

Biblical discernment requires more than finding a verse. We must understand Scripture in context, compare Scripture with Scripture, and accurately apply what God has revealed.

7. Testing Everything Isn’t the Same as Rejecting Everything

The command to test everything shouldn’t encourage distrust, conspiracy thinking, or automatic opposition. The same passage that says “examine everything carefully” also says “hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21 NASB).

Sometimes examination reveals falsehood. Sometimes it confirms truth. Sometimes an argument contains both. And sometimes Scripture gives a clear principle while leaving room for disagreement about the wisest application.

Biblical discernment therefore requires both conviction and humility. We reject what Scripture contradicts, accept what is true, and remain willing to correct ourselves when we discover we were wrong.

D. RENEWING OUR MINDS - THINKING BIBLICALLY

Biblical discernment requires more than knowing individual verses. Christians need to learn to **think** biblically.

Family, education, experience, entertainment, media, politics, friends, and culture all influence how we think.

Because both the world and our own hearts are affected by sin, those influences must be tested.

1. Christians Must Not Be Conformed to the World

Paul wrote:

(Rom. 12:1–2 CSB) “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”

Notice the connection between a renewed mind and discernment.

Christians aren’t supposed to allow the surrounding culture to determine how we think. This doesn’t mean everything culture believes is wrong. It means culture isn’t our standard.

Something doesn’t become true because most people believe it, nor does something God calls good become evil because society condemns it.

2. Our Thinking Must Be Brought Under Christ’s Authority

Paul wrote:

(2 Cor. 10:3–5 NASB) “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

In context, Paul is describing arguments raised against the knowledge of God.

The larger principle is clear: human thinking must be brought into obedience to Christ.

That includes our own thinking. Our assumptions, traditions, moral opinions, preferences, and long-held convictions must remain subject to God’s Word.

3. Mature Christians Shouldn't Be Carried Away by Every Wind of Teaching

Paul warned:

(Eph. 4:14 KJV) "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive..."

A persuasive speaker, popular book, political movement, social-media trend, or changing cultural argument can easily carry us away in the social current when we lack a biblical anchor.

But mature Christians must change their minds when Scripture corrects them.

4. Christians Must Deliberately Think About What Is True

Paul wrote:

(Phil. 4:8 NASB) "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."

Paul begins with "whatever is true."

What we repeatedly watch, read, hear, and think about influences how we understand the world.

Christians should understand difficult ideas, but there is a difference between examining an idea and allowing it to shape us without biblical evaluation.

5. Renewing the Mind Is an Ongoing Process

Christians often absorb false assumptions from culture, upbringing, experience, or poor teaching.

Discernment therefore requires continual exposure to Scripture and willingness to be corrected.

David prayed:

(Ps. 139:23–24 CSB) "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way."

We shouldn't approach Scripture merely asking God to show us where others are wrong. We should ask Him to expose where **we** are wrong.

The goal is to have our minds increasingly transformed by God's truth.

E. LEARNING DISCERNMENT THROUGH PRACTICE

Hebrews teaches that discernment develops through practice. We grow as we repeatedly learn God's Word and apply it to real situations.

1. Discernment Must Be Exercised

Hebrews says:

(Heb. 5:14 CSB) "But solid food is for the mature—for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil."

Discernment develops through use. Reading about discernment isn't enough. When we encounter teachings, moral questions, cultural movements, technologies, or difficult decisions, we must ask what Scripture says and apply it.

Like a muscle strengthened by exercise, discernment becomes stronger through repeated use.

2. God's Word Trains Us to Recognize the Right Path

Proverbs says:

(Prov. 2:6–11 NASB) "For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones. Then you will **discern** righteousness and justice and equity and every good course. For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will guard you, understanding will watch over you..."

Wisdom comes from the LORD, and as His truth takes root, we become increasingly able to "discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course."

Discernment therefore depends upon learning Scripture **before** a difficult issue arises.

The Psalmist prayed:

(Ps. 119:66 KJV) "Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments."

We don't merely need information. We need wisdom to use what God has taught us.

3. Discernment Requires Doing What We Learn

James wrote:

(James 1:22–25 CSB) “But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was. But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does.”

Biblical knowledge alone isn’t enough. We must obey what God shows us.

Obedience reinforces biblical thinking. Each time we recognize and faithfully apply a biblical principle, we train ourselves to do so again. Discernment and obedience belong together.

4. Discernment Improves When We Accept Correction

None of us applies Scripture perfectly. We may overlook a biblical principle, misunderstand the facts, or discover that an assumption was wrong. Proverbs says:

(Prov. 12:15 KJV) “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.”

A discerning Christian must be willing to reconsider and accept correction. That doesn’t mean surrendering biblical convictions whenever someone disagrees. Where God has clearly spoken, His Word remains our standard. But we must distinguish Scripture itself from our interpretation or application.

Sometimes Scripture gives a direct command. At other times, Christians may agree on the biblical principle but disagree about the wisest application. Recognizing that difference is part of mature discernment.

5. Discernment Should Become a Habit

Eventually, discernment should become a normal part of Christian thinking.

When we hear a claim: Is it true?

When we encounter a moral argument: What does God call good or evil?

When someone proposes a solution: What biblical principles apply?

When something new appears: What does Scripture give us to evaluate it?

Some questions require additional study, prayer, factual investigation, or wise counsel. Saying “I don’t know yet” may itself be an act of discernment. But the habit remains the same: bring the issue under the authority of God’s Word.

F. CONCLUSIONS ABOUT WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT DISCERNMENT

Biblical discernment is part of Christian maturity. God expects His people to know His Word, distinguish truth from error and good from evil, and faithfully apply it. Five conclusions follow.

1. God's Word Is the Final Standard

God's Word is the standard of truth for our moral and spiritual conclusions (John 17:17; Ps. 119:104–105). Culture, tradition, experience, emotion, popular opinion, and human expertise may be useful, but none can replace Scripture as our final authority.

2. Christians Must Test What They Hear and Make Righteous Judgments

Scripture commands us to “examine everything carefully” and hold fast to what is good (1 Thess. 5:21–22 NASB). Jesus likewise commands “righteous judgment” while condemning hypocritical judgment (John 7:24; Matt. 7:1–5). We must therefore test teachings, claims, and ideas according to God's Word.

3. Discernment Requires God's Wisdom and a Renewed Mind

Discernment isn't merely intelligence. We need God's wisdom, the work of the Holy Spirit, and minds renewed by Scripture (James 1:5; 1 Cor. 2:14–16; Rom. 12:2). Our assumptions, preferences, traditions, and beliefs must remain subject to God's Word.

4. Discernment Develops Through Practice

Hebrews says mature believers have their senses “trained to discern good and evil” through practice (Heb. 5:14 NASB).

We grow in discernment by learning Scripture, praying for wisdom, applying biblical truth, and accepting correction. Discernment should become a habit of Christian thinking.

5. Discernment Should Lead to Faithfulness

The purpose of discernment isn't merely to identify what is wrong but to faithfully follow Christ.

We recognize truth to believe it, good to do it, error to avoid deception, and evil to reject it. Discernment therefore requires knowing God's Word, relying upon the Holy Spirit, and doing what God shows us.

But truth and falsehood also involve a spiritual battle. The moral confusion of this fallen world can't be understood only as an intellectual problem.

That brings us to the next question: **What does discernment have to do with spiritual warfare?**

II. DISCERNMENT AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

A. THE BATTLE BETWEEN TRUTH AND LIES

Biblical discernment is crucial because the struggle between truth and falsehood isn't merely intellectual. Scripture teaches that a real spiritual battle is also taking place.

Spiritual warfare isn't limited to dramatic encounters with demons. One of Satan's principal weapons is deception. He lies about God, distorts God's Word, promotes false teaching, blinds people to truth, and makes evil appear good.

That makes discernment an important part of spiritual warfare.

1. Spiritual Warfare Is Real

Paul wrote:

(Eph. 6:11–12 NASB) "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Christians must therefore take "the schemes of the devil" and "spiritual forces of wickedness" seriously. But Paul doesn't tell us to fear them. He tells us to "stand firm."

Satan is real, but he isn't God. His power is limited, he can be resisted, and his final defeat is certain. Christians should therefore take spiritual warfare seriously without becoming fearful or obsessed with it.

2. Satan Is the Father of Lies

Jesus described Satan as follows:

(John 8:44 CSB) "You are of your father the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies."

Jesus calls Satan "a liar and the father of lies." Revelation likewise calls him the one who "deceiveth the whole world" (Rev. 12:9 KJV).

This explains why truth matters so much in spiritual warfare. Lies about God, Christ, sin, salvation, morality, justice, family, and other matters can lead people into sin and error.

Learning to distinguish truth from falsehood is therefore part of standing against "the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11 NASB).

3. Satan Often Makes Falsehood Look Like Truth

Paul warned:

(2 Cor. 11:13–15 NASB) “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.”

Satan doesn’t always present evil as obviously evil. He “disguises himself as an angel of light,” and false teachers may appear to be “servants of righteousness.”

A false idea may contain enough truth, compassion, justice, spirituality, or reasonableness to sound right. A teacher may speak about love while redefining love contrary to Scripture. A movement may claim justice while defining justice differently from God.

We therefore can’t simply ask, “Does this sound good?” We must ask, “Is it true?”

Something can “seem[] right” and still lead to death (Prov. 14:12 NASB).

4. False Teaching Can Have a Spiritual Source

Paul wrote:

(1 Tim. 4:1 CSB) “Now the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons...”

This doesn’t mean every mistaken belief comes directly from a demon. People can be poorly taught, uninformed, prideful, stubborn, or deceived by others.

But Scripture also says that false teaching can have a spiritual source. That’s another reason Christians must know sound doctrine, test spiritual claims, and accurately handle “the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15 NASB).

5. Satan Seeks to Blind People to the Gospel

Paul wrote:

(2 Cor. 4:3–4 KJV) “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

Satan seeks to blind unbelievers to “the glorious gospel of Christ.”

This doesn’t eliminate human responsibility. Sinners also willingly suppress God’s truth (Rom. 1:18–25). Human rebellion and satanic deception can operate together. That’s why evangelism, apologetics, doctrine, and discernment are connected. Christians proclaim and defend truth in a world where Satan actively works against it.

6. Christ Is the Truth

Jesus said:

(John 14:6 NASB) “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

Satan is “the father of lies” (John 8:44 CSB), but Jesus is “the truth.”

John also wrote:

(1 John 3:8 CSB) “The one who commits sin is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the devil’s works.”

The Christian life isn’t about looking for a demon behind every problem. The Christian life is about following Christ, knowing His Word, believing truth, rejecting lies, resisting the devil, proclaiming the gospel, and standing in God’s strength.

Not every false idea comes directly from Satan, and not every sin is caused by a demon. Scripture also identifies the fallen world and our own sinful flesh as sources of temptation and deception.

B. THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL

Christians face sin and deception from three related directions: the world around us, the sinful desires within us, and the devil who opposes God and His people.

We shouldn’t blame Satan for every sinful thought or evil act, but neither should we ignore the spiritual enemy Scripture reveals.

1. Scripture Identifies the World, the Flesh, and the Devil

Paul brings all three together:

(Eph. 2:1–3 NASB) “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”

Paul refers to “the course of this world,” “the lusts of our flesh,” and “the prince of the power of the air,” meaning Satan.

These influences often work together. Christians have been made alive with Christ (Eph. 2:4–5), but we still live in a fallen world, struggle against sinful desires, and face the devil’s schemes.

2. The World Pressures Us Toward Conformity

John wrote:

(1 John 2:15–17 CSB) “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one’s possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.”

Here “the world” refers to a system of sinful values and desires in rebellion against God.

The world pressures us by telling us what to value, celebrate, condemn, and believe. Culture may sometimes agree with Scripture, but culture can never be our final standard.

Christians must resist conformity and renew their minds according to God’s truth (Rom. 12:2).

3. The Flesh and the Human Heart Produce Real Evil

Scripture never allows us to blame the devil for our own sin. Jesus said:

(Mark 7:20–23 CSB) “And he said, ‘What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, greed, evil actions, deceit, self-indulgence, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a person.’”

Jesus emphasizes what comes “from within.”

James likewise says:

(James 1:13–15 NASB) “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”

Direct satanic activity isn’t necessary for temptation to occur. Fallen people possess sinful desires of their own.

Paul calls these sinful inclinations “the flesh” and commands Christians to “walk in the Spirit” rather than fulfill its desires (Gal. 5:16–17 KJV).

Biblical discernment therefore requires us to examine our own hearts as well as the culture and Satan’s deception.

4. The Devil Actively Schemes Against Us

Paul wrote:

(Eph. 6:11 NASB) “Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.”

Peter likewise warns:

(1 Pet. 5:8–9 CSB) “Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. Resist him, firm in the faith...”

Satan schemes, tempts, deceives, accuses, and seeks opportunities to exploit weakness. Taking this seriously doesn’t require fear. It means refusing to be naïve about an enemy Scripture commands us to resist.

5. The World, the Flesh, and the Devil Can Work Together

Paul warned:

(Eph. 4:26–27 NASB) “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”

The anger belongs to the person, who remains responsible for it, but sinful anger can also “give the devil an opportunity.”

Genesis 3 shows the same interaction. The serpent deceived Eve, but Eve also saw that the forbidden fruit was desirable (Gen. 3:1–6). Satan tempted, human desire responded, and Adam and Eve remained responsible.

A sinful idea may become culturally accepted, appeal to our sinful desires, and then be exploited by Satan. Human sin and satanic activity can work together.

6. Discernment Helps Us Respond Biblically

We may not always know whether a particular temptation or problem comes primarily from the world, the flesh, or the devil. But Scripture tells us how to respond. We resist worldly conformity by renewing our minds. We resist the flesh by walking in the Spirit. We resist the devil by submitting to God and standing firm in faith.

(James 4:7 KJV) “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

People who teach lies or commit evil may need to be corrected, opposed, or exposed. Yet they remain human beings made in God’s image who need truth, repentance, and the gospel.

One of Satan’s oldest schemes is his attack upon God’s Word.

C. SATAN'S ATTACK ON GOD'S WORD

Because Satan is “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44 CSB), one of his oldest schemes is attacking God’s Word. He questions it, distorts it, contradicts it, and encourages people to place their own judgment above it.

He doesn’t always persuade people to reject Scripture openly. Sometimes he encourages them to doubt, twist, selectively apply, or misuse it while still claiming to respect it.

1. Satan’s Attack on God’s Word Began in the Garden

God commanded Adam:

(Gen. 2:16–17 NASB) “The LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’”

The serpent then approached Eve:

(Gen. 3:1–5 NASB) “Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, “You shall not eat from any tree of the garden”?’ The woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.”’ The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”

Satan first distorted God’s command by making it sound more restrictive than it was. He then directly contradicted God by saying, “You surely will not die!” Finally, he attacked God’s character by implying that God was withholding something good.

The pattern is clear: Satan questions God’s Word, distorts it, contradicts it, and casts doubt upon the goodness of the God who gave it. It began in the Garden and continues today.

2. Satan Tempts Us to Put Our Judgment Above God’s Word

At the heart of Genesis 3 is the question of who determines what is true and good.

God had already spoken, but Satan promised Adam and Eve that they would “be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5 NASB).

Eve then evaluated the tree herself:

(Gen. 3:6 NASB) “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate...”

God had said not to eat, but Eve allowed what she desired to overrule what God had said.

The same temptation remains. When God has clearly spoken, the final question isn't whether His command agrees with our desires or culture. It is whether we will trust and obey Him.

If our judgment stands above Scripture, Scripture is no longer our final authority. We are.

3. Satan Misuses Scripture

Satan not only distorted God's Word in Genesis 3. He also misused Scripture when tempting Jesus:

(Matt. 4:5–7 CSB) "Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' Jesus told him, 'It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God.'"

Satan quoted Psalm 91:11–12 but applied it wrongly. Jesus answered with Deuteronomy 6:16.

The fact that someone quotes Scripture doesn't prove his interpretation is correct. We must ask not only, "Did he quote the Bible?" but also, "Did he use the Bible correctly?"

4. Jesus Responded to Satan With God's Word

When Satan tempted Jesus, Christ repeatedly answered with Scripture:

(Matt. 4:3–4 KJV) "And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Jesus answered with Deuteronomy 8:3 and later with Deuteronomy 6:16 and 6:13 (Matt. 4:7, 10). Jesus didn't merely quote random verses. He understood and applied Scripture correctly.

Christians therefore need more than a handful of favorite verses. The better we know God's Word, the better prepared we are to recognize when it is twisted or misapplied.

5. Scripture Warns That People Will Twist Scripture

Peter wrote:

(2 Pet. 3:15–16 CSB) "Also, regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our dear brother Paul has written to you according to the wisdom given to him. He speaks about these things in all his letters. There are some matters that are hard to understand. The untaught and unstable will twist them to their own destruction, as they also do with the rest of the Scriptures."

Paul therefore instructed Timothy:

(2 Tim. 2:15 NASB) “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”

There is a right and wrong way to handle Scripture. Context matters. We should consider who is speaking, who is addressed, the surrounding passage, the type of writing, and how a passage fits with the rest of God’s Word.

6. Satan Seeks to Keep God’s Word From Taking Root

Jesus explained:

(Matt. 13:18–19 KJV) “Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart...”

Jesus teaches that satanic activity can be involved in preventing God’s Word from taking root.

Human beings remain responsible for how they respond to God, but Satan also works to keep people from hearing, understanding, believing, and obeying Scripture.

7. Christians Must Know God’s Word Well Enough to Recognize the Counterfeit

The answer to Satan’s attack isn’t fear. It is deeper knowledge of truth. Christians should compare what they hear with what Scripture actually says in context and with the whole counsel of God’s Word (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15).

Satan questioned God’s Word in Eden and later misused Scripture when tempting Jesus. Peter warns that people “twist” Scripture, while Paul commands Christians to handle it accurately (2 Pet. 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:15).

Knowing Scripture is therefore essential to spiritual warfare.

(Matt. 24:35 KJV) “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

Satan attacks God’s Word, but he can’t destroy it.

D. SATAN IS LIMITED AND CHRIST IS VICTORIOUS

Christians must take Satan seriously without giving him more power than Scripture does. God and Satan are **not** equal forces struggling over an uncertain outcome.

Satan is a created being whose power is real but limited. Christ has already won the decisive victory, and Satan's final destruction is certain.

1. Satan Is a Creature, Not God's Equal

John wrote of Jesus:

(John 1:1–3 CSB) “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.”

Paul likewise wrote:

(Col. 1:16 NASB) “For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.”

Satan isn't an eternal rival alongside God. He is a created being. He may oppose God, but he can never overthrow Him or prevent God from accomplishing His ultimate purposes.

2. Satan Operates Within Limits God Allows

God told Satan concerning Job:

(Job 2:6 NASB) “So the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.’”

Satan could afflict Job, but only within boundaries God allowed (Job 1:10–12; 2:6).

Jesus likewise told Peter:

(Luke 22:31–32 NASB) “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail...”

Satan is active and dangerous, but he isn't beyond God's sovereign authority.

3. Satan Isn't All-Powerful, All-Knowing, or Everywhere at Once

Scripture attributes unlimited power, knowledge, and presence to God, never to Satan (Ps. 139:1–10; Jer. 32:17; 1 John 3:20).

The Book of Job says:

(Job 1:7 KJV) “And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.”

Satan is portrayed as moving from place to place, not as being everywhere at once.

Scripture also gives no reason to believe Satan knows everything or can independently read human thoughts. Christians shouldn't give the devil qualities that belong to God alone.

4. Satan Can Be Resisted

James wrote:

(James 4:7 KJV) “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Peter likewise commands believers to resist the devil “firm in your faith” (1 Pet. 5:8–9 NASB).

Christians should remain alert because Satan is dangerous, but we resist him because God enables us to stand.

5. Jesus Defeated Satan Through the Cross

The central truth of spiritual warfare isn't Satan's power but Christ's victory:

(Col. 2:13–15 NASB) “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”

Through the cross, Christ dealt with sin and “disarmed the rulers and authorities.”

Hebrews likewise says that through death Jesus rendered powerless “him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14 NASB).

Satan remains active, which is why Christians must still resist him. But he is a defeated enemy awaiting final judgment.

6. Christians Have Been Delivered From Satan's Domain

Paul wrote:

(Col. 1:13 CSB) "He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves."

John likewise says:

(1 John 4:4 CSB) "You are from God, little children, and you have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."

Christians can still be tempted and attacked, but we belong to Christ. We don't face Satan as people abandoned to his dominion.

7. Satan's Final Defeat Is Certain

Revelation describes Satan's final destiny:

(Rev. 20:10 NASB) "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone..."

Paul similarly wrote:

(Rom. 16:20 KJV) "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

The conflict that began in Eden won't continue forever (Gen. 3:15). Satan's judgment is certain because Christ's victory is certain.

Our confidence is therefore in the Lord. Satan may scheme, but Jesus possesses "all authority" in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18 NASB).

That is why Christians stand not in their own strength but in the armor God provides.

E. THE ARMOR OF GOD

Paul explains how Christians stand against spiritual evil:

(Eph. 6:13–18 CSB) “For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.”

Paul repeatedly emphasizes standing. The armor equips Christians to remain faithful when Satan deceives, tempts, accuses, or attacks.

1. The Armor Comes From God

Paul calls it the “armor of God” and first commands us to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (Eph. 6:10 NASB).

Spiritual warfare isn’t won through human cleverness or willpower, and the armor isn’t a magical formula.

To put on the armor of God is to stand in the truth, righteousness, gospel, faith, salvation, Word, and prayer God provides.

2. The Belt of Truth

Paul begins with “truth like a belt around your waist” (Eph. 6:14 CSB).

Since Satan is “the father of lies” (John 8:44 CSB), Christians must know, believe, and live the truth. We can’t effectively resist lies while practicing deception ourselves (Eph. 4:25).

Truth is something we know and something we live.

3. The Breastplate of Righteousness

Paul describes “righteousness like armor on your chest” (Eph. 6:14 CSB).

Our righteous standing with God comes through Christ, not our own goodness (Phil. 3:8–9). But those made right with God are also called to live righteously (Eph. 4:24).

Deliberate sin can give Satan an “opportunity” to exploit weakness (Eph. 4:26–27 NASB). Obedience therefore matters in spiritual warfare.

4. The Gospel of Peace Gives Firm Footing and Readiness

Our feet are to be “sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15 CSB).

Through Christ, believers have peace with God (Rom. 5:1), and we’re commissioned to carry that gospel to others (Rom. 10:14–17).

Satan seeks to blind unbelievers to the gospel, while Christians proclaim the message that points people to Christ (2 Cor. 4:4).

5. The Shield of Faith Protects Against Satan’s Attacks

Paul says:

(Eph. 6:16 NASB) “[I]n addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

Faith trusts God’s character, promises, and Word even when circumstances tempt us to doubt. Satan attacked that trust in Eden, and he still attacks through temptation, accusation, doubt, fear, and discouragement.

Faith doesn’t deny problems. Faith trusts God in the midst of them.

6. The Helmet of Salvation Guards Our Hope

Paul tells Christians to take “the helmet of salvation” (Eph. 6:17 CSB), elsewhere calling it “the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8 CSB).

Satan may tempt or accuse, but he can’t undo what God has accomplished for those who belong to Christ (John 10:27–29).

Salvation therefore gives Christians confidence in the battle.

7. The Sword of the Spirit Is God’s Word

Paul writes:

(Eph. 6:17 NASB) “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

When Satan tempted Jesus, Christ repeatedly answered, “It is written” (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

God’s Word exposes lies, corrects false teaching, reveals sin, and teaches truth. Christians must therefore know and accurately use Scripture (2 Tim. 2:15).

8. Prayer and Watchfulness Are Essential

Paul continues:

(Eph. 6:18 NASB) “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,”

Prayer, alertness, perseverance, and intercession belong to spiritual warfare.

Paul doesn’t tell Christians to search constantly for demons or learn secret formulas. He tells us to stand in truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, God’s Word, and prayer.

These are ordinary parts of the Christian life, but they are also God’s equipment for spiritual battle.

F. DISCERNMENT IS CRITICAL IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Because Satan deceives, spiritual warfare requires discernment. Christians must recognize genuine spiritual danger without becoming fearful, superstitious, or quick to label every troubling situation demonic.

The controlling question remains: Does this agree with what God has revealed?

1. Christians Must Test Spiritual Claims

John wrote:

(1 John 4:1 CSB) “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God...”

Spiritual experiences aren’t proven to be from God merely because they feel powerful or involve something extraordinary.

Moses warned that even a sign that came to pass didn’t authenticate a prophet who led people away from God (Deut. 13:1–3). Paul likewise warned of satanic “power and signs and false wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9–10 NASB).

Spiritual claims and experiences must therefore be tested by Scripture.

2. Not Every Troubling Situation Is Demonic

Jesus taught that evil can arise from the human heart, while James says temptation can arise from our own desires (Mark 7:20–23; James 1:13–15).

Scripture also distinguishes illness from demonic affliction:

(Matt. 4:24 NASB) “The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.”

Matthew distinguishes diseases, epilepsy, and paralysis from demonic affliction.

We should therefore be cautious about declaring an illness, emotional struggle, sinful habit, tragedy, or unusual behavior demonic without good reason. But Scripture also teaches that demons are real. Biblical discernment rejects both extremes.

3. Christians Should Follow Scripture, Not Speculation

Moses wrote:

(Deut. 29:29 KJV) “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

The unseen spiritual realm can invite speculation about demons, territories, secret techniques, and hidden meanings Scripture never clearly teaches.

God has already told Christians what to do: know truth, obey God, resist the devil, stand firm, use Scripture, pray, and remain alert (Eph. 6:10–18; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8–9).

Discernment includes knowing what Scripture says and recognizing when Scripture doesn’t give us enough information to speak confidently.

4. Discernment Helps Us Respond to the Actual Problem

If the problem is false teaching, test it against Scripture (1 Thess. 5:21–22).

If it is sinful desire, repent and walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–17).

If it is worldly pressure, renew the mind (Rom. 12:2).

If Satan is tempting or deceiving, submit to God and resist the devil (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8–9).

When we don’t know precisely what is happening, we don’t need to invent an explanation. We should pray for wisdom, examine the facts, and apply what Scripture clearly teaches.

Discernment keeps Christians from being naïve about Satan without becoming obsessed with him.

Discernment acknowledges the supernatural without becoming superstitious and keeps our attention on faithfully following Christ.

G. CONCLUSIONS ABOUT DISCERNMENT AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Biblical spiritual warfare isn't a subject for fear or speculation. Scripture teaches us enough to recognize Satan's schemes and stand faithfully in God's strength. Five conclusions follow.

1. Spiritual Warfare Is Real

Satan and demons are real, and Christians face "spiritual forces of wickedness" (Eph. 6:11–12 NASB). But not every temptation, false belief, illness, or evil act comes directly from demons. Scripture also identifies the fallen world and our sinful hearts as sources of temptation (Mark 7:20–23; James 1:13–15).

We should take spiritual warfare seriously without becoming fearful or obsessed.

2. Deception Is One of Satan's Principal Weapons

Satan is "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44 CSB). He blinds people to the gospel, disguises evil as good, and promotes false teaching (2 Cor. 4:3–4; 11:13–15; 1 Tim. 4:1). Christians must therefore know truth well enough to recognize falsehood, even when it appears good.

3. God's Word Is Essential to Spiritual Warfare

Satan questioned God's Word in Eden and misused Scripture while tempting Jesus (Gen. 3:1–5; Matt. 4:5–7). Jesus answered with Scripture correctly understood and applied (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

Paul therefore calls God's Word "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17 NASB). Christians must know Scripture and test what they hear against it.

4. Satan Is Limited, but Christ Is Victorious

Satan is a created being under God's authority (Col. 1:16; Job 1:10–12). Christ defeated him through the cross, and his final judgment is certain (Col. 2:13–15; Rev. 20:10). Satan remains active, but Christians resist a defeated enemy while trusting the victorious Christ.

5. Christians Must Stand in the Armor God Provides

God tells us to stand in truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, His Word, and prayer (Eph. 6:13–18). We resist worldly conformity by renewing our minds, sinful desires by walking in the Spirit, and the devil by submitting to God (Rom. 12:2; Gal. 5:16; James 4:7).

The purpose of studying spiritual warfare isn't to become preoccupied with Satan, but to follow Christ faithfully. Once God shows us what is true and good, we must act upon it.

That brings us to the next part of this study: **Discernment should lead to action.**

III. DISCERNMENT SHOULD LEAD TO ACTION

A. BE DOERS OF THE WORD

In Section I, we considered how Christians distinguish truth from error and good from evil. In Section II, we saw that this struggle also has a spiritual dimension. But discernment hasn't accomplished its purpose if we reach the right conclusion and then do nothing.

God gave us His Word not merely to increase our knowledge, but to teach us what to believe, reject, and do. God's Word must move from confession to conviction to conduct.

1. Hearing Without Doing Is Self-Deception

James writes:

(James 1:22–25 CSB) “But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was. But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does.”

James says that “hearers only” are “deceiving” themselves. We can study Scripture and agree with biblical truth while refusing to obey it.

Jesus made the same point when He compared the person who hears and obeys His words to a wise man who built on rock, while the person who hears without obeying built on sand (Matt. 7:24–27).

God's Word may expose a sin to confess, a false belief to reject, a person to forgive, a truth to speak, or a good work to do. Once God shows us what is right, we must respond faithfully.

2. Obedience Is the Fruit, Not the Cause, of Salvation

Emphasizing obedience doesn't mean we earn salvation by works. Paul writes:

(Eph. 2:8–10 NASB) “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Verses 8–9 rule out salvation by works, while verse 10 says Christians are saved for good works. James likewise says that faith without works “is dead” (James 2:17 CSB).

Legalism says, “I obey, therefore God accepts me.” The gospel says, “God accepts me in Christ, therefore I obey.” Obedience isn't the root of salvation; it is the fruit of living faith.

3. Sin Includes Failing to Do What God Commands

James writes:

(James 4:17 NASB) “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

Sin includes doing what God forbids and failing to do what He requires.

This doesn’t make every Christian responsible for every wrong. We have different callings, abilities, resources, and opportunities. But our inability to do everything can’t become an excuse for doing nothing.

Discernment therefore asks: What faithful response does God require from me here?

The answer may involve repentance, prayer, generosity, warning someone, speaking truth, defending another person, or refusing to participate in evil.

4. Biblical Obedience Extends to Every Area of Life

Paul writes:

(Col. 3:17 NASB) “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

“Whatever you do” leaves no part of life outside Christ’s authority.

Christianity can’t be confined to private belief or Sunday worship. It affects how we live at home, at work, in church, in our communities, and in public life.

At its simplest, Christian activism is Christian faith and obedience lived publicly wherever God has placed us.

Discernment without obedience can become informed disobedience, while action without discernment can become misguided.

Christians need both: we must understand what God says and faithfully do what He requires.

B. SALT, LIGHT, AND SPEAKING THE TRUTH

Being a doer of the Word affects not only our private conduct but also how we live before others. Jesus calls His followers the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Christian witness must therefore be visible, truthful, and loving.

1. Christians Are Salt and Light

Jesus said:

(Matt. 5:13 CSB) “You are the salt of the earth.”

He continued:

(Matt. 5:14–16 NASB) “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Christians can’t fulfill this calling by simply adopting the values of the surrounding culture or hiding biblical truth whenever it becomes unpopular.

Yet neither salt nor light is useful when isolated from what surrounds it. Christians should engage the world without conforming to it.

Our faith should be visible in holiness, honesty, mercy, courage, generosity, good works, and truth. The purpose isn’t self-glory but that others may “glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

2. Christians Must Speak the Truth With Love and Grace

Paul tells Christians to speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15 KJV) and writes:

(Col. 4:6 CSB) “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.”

Truth and love aren’t competing values. Love affects how and why we speak; truth governs what we say.

Graciousness doesn’t require vagueness or cowardice. Gentleness doesn’t require silence or compromise. Christians should avoid insults, contempt, exaggeration, gossip, reckless accusations, and needless provocation while still speaking clearly when truth requires it (Eph. 4:29; 1 Pet. 3:15).

Sometimes biblical love encourages. Sometimes it corrects, warns, or rebukes. Our responsibility is to speak truth faithfully and lovingly.

3. Discernment Helps Us Know When and How to Speak

Solomon wrote:

(Eccl. 3:7b KJV) “[A] time to keep silence, and a time to speak...”

Christians don’t have to respond to every error or controversy. We should consider whether the facts are established, whether Scripture speaks clearly, whether we have a responsibility to respond, and whether our words are likely to help.

But silence can also become sinful when God’s Word makes our duty clear and we remain quiet because we fear criticism or personal cost (Eph. 5:11; James 4:17).

The Christian calling isn’t to maintain a running commentary on everything. It is to remain faithful wherever God has placed us.

C. SEEKING JUSTICE AND DEFENDING OTHERS

Biblical righteousness isn’t defined only by the evil we personally avoid. Scripture commands Christians to do good, pursue justice, oppose wrongdoing, and defend vulnerable people.

This doesn’t require supporting every movement or policy that uses the word “justice.” God defines justice, and discernment requires both biblical standards and accurate facts.

1. God Commands His People to Do Justice

Micah wrote:

(Mic. 6:8 NASB) “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

God commands His people to “do justice,” not merely believe in it.

Proverbs similarly says:

(Prov. 21:3 NASB) “To do righteousness and justice is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice.”

Religious activity can’t substitute for righteous conduct. Biblical justice means treating people according to what is right under God’s standards.

2. Christians Should Defend and Help Others

Isaiah wrote:

(Isa. 1:17 CSB) “Learn to do what is good. Pursue justice. Correct the oppressor. Defend the rights of the fatherless. Plead the widow’s cause.”

Proverbs likewise says:

(Prov. 31:8–9 CSB) “Speak up for those who have no voice, for the justice of all who are dispossessed. Speak up, judge righteously, and defend the cause of the oppressed and needy.”

Jesus’ Good Samaritan likewise shows that loving our neighbor requires more than good intentions. The Samaritan saw a wounded man and acted to help him (Luke 10:30–37).

There are therefore times when biblical love requires Christians to use their voice, resources, influence, or lawful authority to help others. That may include children, the unborn, elderly people, victims of abuse or exploitation, the poor, disabled people, or those falsely accused.

We can’t meet every need, but when we have the ability and opportunity to help, biblical love should move us toward appropriate action (Gal. 6:10).

3. Biblical Justice Must Be Impartial and Based on Truth

God commanded:

(Lev. 19:15 NASB) “You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.”

Biblical justice doesn’t assume that either the powerful or the vulnerable is automatically right. It treats people according to truth rather than class, wealth, status, or group identity.

Seeking justice therefore requires knowing the facts:

(Prov. 18:17 NASB) “The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him.”

Headlines, accusations, viral posts, or edited videos may not tell the whole story. Our desire to oppose injustice must not cause us to commit injustice.

Christians should examine the evidence before reaching conclusions.

4. Justice Must Remain Joined With Mercy and Humility

Micah commands us not only to “do justice” but also to “love kindness” and “walk humbly” with God (Mic. 6:8 NASB).

Without truth, justice can become unjust. Without mercy, it can become vindictive. Without humility, it can become self-righteous.

The central point remains: biblical discernment doesn’t permit indifference. God commands His people to do good, defend others, and seek justice when opportunity and responsibility are present.

D. THE CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITIES AS A CITIZEN

Christians belong ultimately to Jesus Christ, but heavenly citizenship doesn't erase earthly responsibilities.

Believers have lived under many forms of government, and their opportunities have differed greatly. Yet Scripture gives principles for faithful citizenship wherever God places us.

1. Our Heavenly Citizenship Is Ultimate

Paul wrote:

(Phil. 3:20 NASB) "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;"

Our highest allegiance belongs to Christ. No nation, government, constitution, ruler, or earthly cause can replace Him.

Yet Paul also used his Roman citizenship, asserted his legal rights, appealed to Caesar, and proclaimed biblical truth before officials (Acts 16:37–39; 22:25–29; 24:24–25; 25:10–12).

Heavenly citizenship establishes the proper order of our loyalties rather than requiring earthly indifference.

2. Christians Should Seek the Good of the Place Where They Live

God told the Jewish exiles in Babylon:

(Jer. 29:7 NASB) "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare."

The command was specifically given to Israelite exiles, but it demonstrates that God's people can remain faithful while seeking the good of the society around them.

Christians should care whether their communities are peaceful, safe, just, and orderly, whether innocent people are protected, and whether wrongdoing is restrained.

Paul also commands Christians to pray for "kings and all who are in authority" (1 Tim. 2:1–2 NASB). We should pray for leaders we support and those we oppose.

3. Christians Should Respect Legitimate Government Authority

Paul writes:

(Rom. 13:1 NASB) "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."

Peter likewise commands submission to civil authority "for the Lord's sake" (1 Pet. 2:13–17).

Christians should ordinarily obey laws, pay what is owed, and respect legitimate authority whether or not we voted for a particular leader or agree with every policy (Rom. 13:6–7).

But government authority isn't unlimited:

(Acts 5:29 NASB) "We must obey God rather than men."

Every earthly authority remains subordinate to God.

4. Christians May Use Their Lawful Rights and Opportunities

Paul submitted to legitimate government while also asserting his legal rights. He objected to unlawful treatment and appealed to Caesar when appropriate (Acts 16:37–39; 22:25–29; 25:10–12).

Christians therefore aren't required to choose between submission and lawfully using their rights.

Americans possess opportunities that first-century Christians generally didn't have. We can vote, petition government, contact officials, organize, advocate, seek office, peacefully demonstrate, and use courts.

These opportunities are forms of stewardship. They should be used wisely rather than treated as spiritually meaningless.

E. WHEN WE MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN

Christians ordinarily respect and submit to legitimate authority. But government isn't God. Scripture repeatedly records situations in which obedience to human authority would have required disobedience to God.

This principle doesn't allow Christians to disregard laws simply because we dislike them. Biblical discernment distinguishes political disagreement from an actual conflict between human commands and God's commands.

1. The Governing Principle Is That We Must Obey God Rather Than Men

When authorities ordered the apostles to stop preaching Christ, they answered:

(Acts 5:29 NASB) "We must obey God rather than men."

Normally Christians submit to human authority because God commands it. But when human authority commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands, the higher authority controls.

2. Scripture Gives Clear Examples of Faithful Disobedience

Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill newborn boys, but they “feared God” and refused (Ex. 1:15–21).

Nebuchadnezzar ordered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to worship a golden image. They answered:

(Dan. 3:17–18 NASB) “[O]ur God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire... But even if He does not... we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Daniel continued praying when the government prohibited prayer (Dan. 6:10).

The apostles continued preaching Christ after authorities repeatedly ordered them to stop (Acts 4:18–20; 5:17–29, 42).

The circumstances differ, but the principle is the same: human authority can’t make evil good or release Christians from obedience to God.

3. Jesus Himself Never Treated Human Authority as Absolute

Jesus said:

(Mark 12:17 KJV) “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

Caesar has legitimate claims, but Caesar doesn’t have God’s claims. When Pilate emphasized his authority, Jesus answered:

(John 19:11 NASB) “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above...”

Human rulers possess genuine but delegated authority. Their authority remains under God.

4. Lawful Resistance Isn’t the Same as Civil Disobedience

Submission doesn’t mean Christians must surrender lawful rights.

Paul challenged unlawful treatment and used his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:35–39; 22:25–29; 25:10–12).

Voting, filing suit, appealing a decision, petitioning officials, peacefully protesting, and asserting legal rights aren’t necessarily acts of disobedience at all.

Christians should ordinarily use lawful remedies when available. But if government ultimately requires sin, Acts 5:29 still controls.

5. Civil Disobedience Requires More Than Political Disagreement

The biblical examples involve direct moral conflicts. The Hebrew midwives were commanded to kill children. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were commanded to commit idolatry. Daniel was forbidden to pray. The apostles were forbidden to preach Christ.

A law may be foolish, burdensome, unfair, or politically objectionable without requiring disobedience.

The clearest case for required disobedience exists when government commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands.

6. Christians Should Remain Faithful in the Way They Resist

Daniel remained generally law-abiding while continuing to pray. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego spoke firmly without needless contempt. The apostles continued preaching without turning to revenge.

Christians should therefore resist only as faithfulness requires and use lawful protections when possible.

Romans 13, 1 Peter 2, and Acts 5:29 must all remain in our Bibles. Emphasizing resistance while ignoring submission can produce lawlessness. Emphasizing submission while ignoring Acts 5:29 can give government authority God never intended it to possess.

Our highest allegiance belongs to Christ. When human authority truly conflicts with God's authority, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29 NASB).

F. PRACTICAL WAYS CHRISTIANS CAN ACT

Biblical action won't look the same in every situation. It may involve prayer, evangelism, service, speaking, giving, civic engagement, or another faithful response.

Discernment asks not merely, "What can I do?" but, "What should I do according to God's Word, the facts, my responsibilities, and the opportunities God has given me?"

1. Pray for Wisdom

James writes:

(James 1:5 CSB) "Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him."

We should pray for wisdom, courage, humility, protection for those being harmed, repentance for wrongdoers, and opportunities for the gospel. Prayer should lead us toward faithful obedience rather than becoming an excuse for doing nothing (James 4:17).

2. Share the Gospel and Teach Biblical Truth

Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples and teach them to observe everything He commanded (Matt. 28:19–20).

Cultural engagement can never replace evangelism. Humanity's deepest problem is sin, and salvation comes through Christ.

Christians therefore share the gospel, teach Scripture, answer objections, correct falsehood, disciple believers, and teach their children.

3. Serve People and Meet Practical Needs

James writes:

(James 2:15–16 CSB) “If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, stay warm, and be well fed,’ but you don’t give them what the body needs, what good is it?”

Biblical concern should become practical help when we have the ability and opportunity.

That may involve food, shelter, transportation, financial help, childcare, disaster assistance, helping vulnerable mothers and children, or countless other forms of service.

4. Speak and Act When Truth and Justice Require It

Scripture commands Christians to “speak up” for those who cannot adequately speak for themselves (Prov. 31:8–9) and to expose “the unfruitful deeds of darkness” (Eph. 5:11 NASB).

Before acting, we should establish the facts and make sure our conclusions are biblical. But when truth and justice require a response, silence may not be faithful.

That response may involve a private conversation, warning someone, reporting wrongdoing, defending the falsely accused, contacting authorities, speaking publicly, or otherwise opposing wrongdoing.

5. Use Lawful Civic, Political, and Economic Means

Scripture doesn’t contain the modern command, “You must vote,” because biblical societies didn’t possess our representative political system. But Scripture commands Christians to seek good, pursue justice, defend others, and faithfully use opportunities.

Christians in a constitutional republic should therefore vote, petition, contact officials, support worthy candidates or causes, peacefully demonstrate, seek office, and use courts when appropriate.

Voting should be approached as stewardship rather than mere party loyalty. No candidate or party perfectly represents biblical truth, so Christians should evaluate choices according to Scripture and the relevant facts.

Christians should also use their money wisely. We may support churches, missions, charities, pregnancy-resource centers, relief ministries, and other efforts that accomplish genuine good.

We may also choose not to support businesses or activities when doing so would violate conscience or materially support evil.

6. Use the Position and Abilities God Has Given You

Christians can serve faithfully through ordinary responsibilities. Teachers can teach with integrity, employers can act justly, physicians can protect life, attorneys can seek justice, government employees can serve honestly, parents can teach biblical truth, and pastors can equip believers.

Joseph, Daniel, Esther, and Paul all used positions or rights God had given them to serve others and advance what was right (Gen. 41:39–44; Dan. 1–6; Esth. 4–8; Acts 16:37–39).

Faithfulness isn't measured by prominence but by how we use what God has placed in our hands.

Different problems require different responses. Hunger may require food, false doctrine biblical instruction, crime proper authorities, an unjust law lawful opposition, and a lost person the gospel.

When God gives us a clear duty and reasonable opportunity, discernment should move us toward faithful action.

G. KEEPING THE GOSPEL FIRST

Christians are called to act—to obey God, live as salt and light, speak truth, seek justice, defend others, fulfill civic responsibilities, and obey God over men when necessary.

But none of those responsibilities can replace the gospel. Political victories can't save sinners. Good laws can restrain evil, but they can't reconcile anyone to God. Only Jesus Christ can save.

Keeping the gospel first, however, doesn't mean keeping the gospel alone. Those transformed by the gospel are called to obey everything Christ commands.

1. The Gospel Is the Power of God for Salvation

Paul wrote:

(Rom. 1:16 NASB) "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

Humanity's greatest problem is sin. Legislation, elections, activism, education, charity, and social reform can accomplish genuine good, but they can't reconcile sinners to God.

Paul summarizes the gospel:

(1 Cor. 15:3b-4 CSB) "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..."

Christ died for our sins and rose again. That message must remain central because salvation is humanity's greatest need.

2. Keeping the Gospel First Doesn't Mean Doing Nothing Else

Some Christians say, "We should just preach the gospel." The concern contains an important truth: evangelism must never be replaced by politics or moral reform.

But preaching the gospel can't become an excuse for ignoring everything else God commands.

Jesus told us to make disciples and teach them "to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20 NASB). Paul likewise says believers should "devote themselves to good works" (Titus 3:8 CSB).

The gospel produces obedience. The gospel is first, but first doesn't mean only.

3. Government Restrains Evil, but the Gospel Changes Hearts

Romans 13 describes government as God's servant to punish wrongdoing and promote good (Rom. 13:3-4).

Government can restrain murder, theft, violence, fraud, and other evil. But it can't regenerate a sinner.

(2 Cor. 5:17 KJV) "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

A law can prohibit murder, but it can't create love. It can punish theft, but it can't produce generosity.

Christians should therefore reject both errors: changing laws won't save people, but the fact that laws can't save doesn't make laws unimportant.

We can preach the gospel while seeking just laws because the two accomplish different things.

4. Christ Must Remain Above Every Political Loyalty

The Psalmist warned:

(Ps. 146:3 KJV) “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.”

Government matters, and political decisions can produce great good or harm. But no leader, movement, or government can forgive sin, give eternal life, or replace Jesus Christ.

Christians may support candidates, oppose policies, vote, petition, demonstrate, or serve in government. But we must not excuse wrongdoing merely because our political side commits it, nor should political success become our ultimate hope.

Faithfulness is more important than winning an election, passing a law, or gaining cultural approval.

Our responsibility is to proclaim the gospel, speak truth, defend others, seek justice, and obey Christ. The results belong to God.

Biblical discernment should lead to action, but that action must remain Christian action—grounded in Scripture, shaped by Christ’s character, and centered upon His gospel.

H. CONCLUSIONS ABOUT DISCERNMENT AND ACTION

Biblical discernment shouldn’t end with identifying truth and error. Once God’s Word shows us what is good, we must ask what obedience requires. Five conclusions follow.

1. Discernment Must Lead to Obedience

James commands Christians to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22 CSB). We learn truth to believe it, good to do it, and evil to reject it. Discernment without obedience can become informed disobedience, while action without discernment can become misguided.

2. Christian Obedience Should Be Visible in Love and Good Works

Jesus calls Christians “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:13–16). Our faith should affect how we live, speak, serve, seek justice, and help others. We can’t correct every wrong, but inability to do everything isn’t an excuse for doing nothing (Mic. 6:8; Gal. 6:10).

3. Christians Should Faithfully Use the Opportunities God Gives Us

Our “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20 NASB), but Christians still have earthly responsibilities. We should pray for leaders, respect legitimate authority, use lawful rights and civic opportunities, and seek the good of the communities where God has placed us.

4. God's Authority Is Higher Than Human Authority

Christians ordinarily submit to government because God has ordained civil authority (Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:13–17). But when government commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands:

(Acts 5:29 NASB) “We must obey God rather than men.”

5. The Gospel Must Remain at the Center of Christian Action

Political action may restrain evil and protect people, but it can't save sinners. Only Christ can reconcile us to God (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:3–4). Keeping the gospel first doesn't mean ignoring Christ's other commands. The gospel produces disciples who proclaim Christ, do good, love their neighbors, speak truth, seek justice, and resist evil.

Our responsibility is faithfulness. The results belong to God.

We've now considered what biblical discernment is, why spiritual warfare makes it necessary, and why discernment should lead to action.

The next question is practical: How do we work through an issue step by step to reach a biblical conclusion? That brings us to **the I.R.A.C.P. method**.

IV. HOW TO DISCERN: THE I.R.A.C.P. METHOD

We now need a practical method for working through an issue step by step.

Some questions have direct biblical answers. Others require us to identify biblical principles, determine the relevant facts, and apply those principles carefully.

Without a method, we may begin with the conclusion we already want, rely upon bad information, misuse Scripture, or confuse our own judgment with what God has actually said.

To help us think carefully, we'll use the I.R.A.C.P. method:

- I** — Issue: What is the issue?
- R** — Rule: What does the Bible say?
- A** — Analysis: How does Scripture apply?
- C** — Conclusion: What should we conclude?
- P** — Policy: Why is God's way good?

I.R.A.C.P. is adapted from a method used in legal reasoning. It doesn't replace Scripture, prayer, the Holy Spirit, or wisdom. It simply gives us an orderly way to move from a question to a biblical conclusion.

A. WHY WE NEED A METHOD

Biblical discernment requires humility. We can misunderstand Scripture, get the facts wrong, reason poorly, or allow our desires to influence us. We therefore need God's wisdom:

(James 1:5 CSB) "Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him."

1. Begin With the Question, Not the Answer

One of the easiest ways to misuse Scripture is to decide what we want to believe and then search for verses supporting it.

Proverbs warns that a way may seem right and still be wrong (Prov. 14:12). I.R.A.C.P. therefore begins with the Issue rather than the Conclusion.

We identify the question, determine what Scripture teaches, examine the facts, and then reach a conclusion.

We must allow God's Word to correct us rather than trying to make God's Word agree with us.

2. Distinguish Scripture From Our Application

We should distinguish between what Scripture directly says and how we apply it. For example:

(Ex. 20:16 KJV) “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.”

The biblical Rule is clear. Whether a particular statement, advertisement, accusation, or news report violates that Rule may require additional facts and reasoning.

Our application may be correct, but our reasoning doesn’t possess the same authority as Scripture. That is why Christians must accurately handle “the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15 NASB).

3. Get Both the Bible and the Facts Right

Applying the right biblical Rule to the wrong facts can still produce the wrong answer.

(Prov. 18:17 NASB) “The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him.”

Discernment therefore requires us to understand both Scripture and the situation accurately. We may need to hear both sides, examine evidence, check reliable sources, or simply admit that we don’t yet know enough.

Where Scripture is clear, we should be clear. Where facts or applications are uncertain, we should acknowledge that uncertainty.

Biblical discernment should ultimately lead to obedience (James 1:22). The goal isn’t merely to reach the right answer but to faithfully act upon what God has shown us.

B. THE I.R.A.C.P. METHOD

I — ISSUE: WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

The first step is identifying exactly what we're trying to decide.

(Prov. 18:13 NASB) "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him."

1. State the Issue Clearly

A good Issue is usually a clear question: Is abortion morally permissible? When must Christians disobey government? May a Christian lie to accomplish a good purpose?

"What does the Bible say about government?" is very broad. "When may a Christian refuse to obey a government command?" is specific enough to analyze.

2. Define Important Terms

Many cultural arguments become confused because people use the same words to mean different things.

Words such as justice, equality, racism, gender, rights, socialism, nationalism, oppression, freedom, and love must be defined before we can evaluate the claims being made.

For example, someone may use "love" to mean affirming another person's desires. Scripture, however, says love "does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6 NASB).

Before deciding whether an idea is biblical, we need to know what the idea actually is.

3. Separate Moral Questions From Factual and Practical Questions

Scripture may clearly condemn lying, but whether a particular person lied depends upon the facts.

Likewise, Scripture clearly commands Christians to care for the poor, but believers may disagree about the wisest practical way to do that.

Discernment therefore asks three different questions when necessary: What does Scripture require? What are the facts? What practical response is wisest?

We should understand an argument before criticizing it and never allow a slogan or emotionally loaded label to decide the Issue for us.

Once the Issue is clear, we ask: What does the Bible say?

R — RULE: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

The Rule is what Scripture teaches that governs the Issue.

1. Scripture Is the Final Authority

We should keep this foundational passage foremost in our minds:

(2 Tim. 3:16–17 NASB) “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

The Rule therefore begins with the question: What does the Bible say?

2. Look for Commands, Principles, and Doctrines

Some Rules are direct. Scripture forbids murder, adultery, theft, and false witness (Ex. 20:13–16). Other issues require applying enduring biblical principles. The Bible doesn’t mention artificial intelligence or social media, but it commands truthfulness (Eph. 4:25). Technology changes; God’s moral truth doesn’t.

Doctrine can also provide Rules. Creation teaches that God made mankind male and female (Gen. 1:27). The image of God establishes human dignity (Gen. 1:26–27). Human depravity reminds us that people and institutions are sinful (Rom. 3:23). Government is ordained by God but remains under His authority (Rom. 13:1–4; Acts 5:29).

3. Interpret Scripture Carefully

A verse can be quoted correctly and still be applied incorrectly. We must consider its context and compare Scripture with Scripture.

I.R.A.C.P. therefore depends upon sound biblical interpretation. Use the principles in **Appendix A: Principles for Interpreting the Bible**, and when relevant passages appear inconsistent, use the **Apparent Inconsistency Resolution (AIR) Method in Appendix B**.

4. Don’t Claim More Than Scripture Says

We must distinguish between what Scripture commands or forbids, the principles Scripture establishes, and our application of those principles. Those don’t carry equal authority.

Where God has clearly spoken, we should stand firmly. Where Scripture gives a principle but leaves its particular application to wisdom, we shouldn’t treat our judgment as though God directly commanded it.

A — ANALYSIS: HOW DOES SCRIPTURE APPLY?

Analysis brings the biblical Rule and the facts together. The question is simple: Given what Scripture teaches and what the facts establish, how does the Rule apply?

1. Determine the Facts

Suppose Scripture commands truthfulness (Eph. 4:25), and the Issue is whether someone lied. We still need to know what the person said, whether it was false, whether he knew it was false, and whether he intended to deceive.

A headline, statistic, accusation, or short video may not tell the whole story. Consider:

(Prov. 18:17 NASB) “The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him.”

Discernment involves distinguishing facts from claims and assumptions. When the evidence is incomplete, “I don’t know yet” may be the wisest answer.

2. Apply All Relevant Biblical Rules

One biblical principle shouldn’t be used to erase another. Christians should help people in need, but need doesn’t make theft right (James 2:15–16; Ex. 20:15). Christians ordinarily submit to government, but government can’t require us to sin (Rom. 13:1–7; Acts 5:29). Likewise, a good goal doesn’t justify sinful means. Paul rejects the idea, “Let us do evil that good may come” (Rom. 3:8 NASB).

We can’t defend truth through lies, seek justice through injustice, or accomplish a good purpose through sinful conduct.

When multiple passages or biblical Rules must be brought together, apply the **interpretive principles in Appendix A** and, if the biblical Rules appear inconsistent, use the **AIR Method in Appendix B** before reaching the Conclusion.

3. Examine Our Reasoning and Motives

Our own hearts can deceive us (Jer. 17:9). Fear, anger, pride, financial interest, personal experience, or strong emotion can influence how we interpret the evidence. David prayed: (Ps. 139:23–24 CSB) “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way.”

We should examine our own assumptions as carefully as we examine everyone else’s.

We should also recognize that Scripture sometimes permits more than one faithful choice (Rom. 14:1–6). Where Scripture speaks clearly, stand clearly. Where facts remain uncertain, acknowledge uncertainty. Where Scripture permits several choices, allow the liberty Scripture allows.

C — CONCLUSION: WHAT SHOULD WE CONCLUDE?

The Conclusion answers the Issue based upon the Rule and Analysis. Consider:

(1 Thess. 5:21–22 NASB) “But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.”

1. Answer the Issue Directly

The Conclusion shouldn’t go beyond what the Rule and Analysis establish.

If Scripture directly prohibits something, our Conclusion should say so clearly.

If the answer depends upon disputed facts or a prudential judgment, our Conclusion should reflect that uncertainty.

The Conclusion can be no stronger than the evidence supporting it.

2. Be Confident Where Scripture Is Clear

Biblical humility doesn’t require uncertainty where God has spoken.

Murder, adultery, theft, idolatry, and false witness are sinful. God created mankind male and female. Salvation comes through Jesus Christ (Ex. 20:3–17; Gen. 1:27; John 14:6).

Where Scripture is clear, Christians should be clear.

3. Be Humble Where Human Judgment Is Involved

Some questions involve policy, strategy, disputed facts, or predictions Scripture doesn’t directly settle.

Christians may agree upon the biblical principle while disagreeing about the wisest application. We shouldn’t imply that disagreement with our judgment is necessarily disagreement with God.

Sometimes the proper Conclusion is simply, “I don’t know yet.”

Scripture doesn’t change, but our interpretation or understanding of the facts may be wrong. We should be willing to correct our Conclusion when Scripture or better evidence requires it.

P — POLICY: WHY IS GOD’S WAY GOOD?

“Policy” here doesn’t mean government policy. It means the reason, wisdom, or good reflected in God’s Rule.

Moses told Israel that God gave His commands “for your own good” (Deut. 10:13 CSB).

1. God’s Commands Reflect His Character

God’s commands aren’t arbitrary. They come from the perfectly good, holy, just, loving, and wise Creator.

(Ps. 119:68 KJV) “Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.”

God commands truth because He is truthful, justice because He is just, holiness because He is holy, and love because He is love (Titus 1:2; Deut. 32:4; 1 Pet. 1:15–16; 1 John 4:8).

God’s commands protect what is good. Commands against theft protect property. Commands against false witness protect truth and justice. Biblical marriage protects the union of husband and wife. Commands to defend the vulnerable protect those who may not be able to protect themselves.

2. Sin Often Promises Good While Producing Harm

Satan presented forbidden fruit as something desirable and beneficial (Gen. 3:4–6).

Sin still works that way. Adultery may promise pleasure while destroying faithfulness. Dishonesty may promise advantage while undermining trust. Greed may promise security while enslaving the heart.

Policy asks: What good does God’s command protect, and what harm does it restrain?

Understanding that helps us explain why God’s way is good.

3. We Obey Even When We Don’t Fully Understand

Understanding God’s wisdom strengthens obedience, but understanding isn’t a condition of obedience.

(Prov. 3:5 NASB) “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.”

We shouldn’t invent reasons God hasn’t revealed, but neither should we refuse obedience because we don’t fully understand His reason.

When God has clearly spoken, our responsibility is to trust and obey Him.

C. CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE I.R.A.C.P. METHOD

I.R.A.C.P. gives us a simple way to organize biblical discernment:

I — Identify the Issue.

R — Determine the biblical Rule.

A — Analyze how the Rule applies to the facts.

C — Reach the Conclusion supported by Scripture and the facts.

P — Consider the wisdom and goodness behind God's way.

The method is simple, but the principles behind it are important. Begin with the question rather than the answer. Let Scripture supply the Rule. Get the facts right. Distinguish God's Word from your own application. Be confident where Scripture is clear and humble where human judgment is involved.

Most importantly, I.R.A.C.P. should lead to obedience, not merely a conclusion. Consider:

(James 1:22 CSB) "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

Once we know what God has said, we should faithfully act upon it.

V. DISCERNING COMMON CULTURAL ISSUES

A. MARXISM - THE DEVIL'S COUNTERFEIT

1. INTRODUCTION - WHY DO CHRISTIANS NEED TO ADDRESS MARXISM?

a. The Danger We Failed to See

In the film "The Two Towers" (2002) in the Lord of the Rings Trilogy, King Théoden spends much of the story unable or unwilling to see the danger growing around him. While the enemy Saruman had been preparing for war and building an enormous army, Wormtongue has been poisoning Théoden's mind, weakening his leadership, and dissuading him from responding to the growing threat. Eventually the enemy chased Théoden and his people from their village to their fall-back position at Helm's Deep.

After seeing the giant horde of enemies amassed before Helm's Deep, and after the enemy had come over the walls and were banging on the locked doors, Théoden seems to be giving up and asks, "What can Men do against such reckless hate?" (The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers [2002].)

There's an important lesson here.

A danger doesn't have to appear overnight. It can grow gradually while the people threatened by it are distracted, misled, complacent, or convinced that warnings are exaggerated. By the time the danger becomes impossible to ignore, much of the preparation has already taken place.

That's one of the many dangers of incrementalism. A sudden radical change may shock people into resistance, while a series of smaller changes can become accepted one step at a time. Each new step becomes familiar, and what once seemed unthinkable can eventually appear normal.

Something similar has happened with Marxist influence in America.

The hour is late, yet many Americans—including many Christians—still treat Marxism as though it were imaginary, exaggerated, or safely buried with the Soviet Union. It isn't.

b. Marxism Is the Most Serious Ideological Threat Facing America Today

This study concludes that Marxism is the most serious ideological threat facing America today.

Marxism has developed into a comprehensive worldview that has transformed governments, political movements, universities, law, education, social theories, and culture throughout the world.

Because this Study Guide is written primarily for Christians in America, we'll focus especially upon Marxism's influence here.

Marxism didn't disappear when the Soviet Union collapsed. Communist governments still rule China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam.

Together, those five countries contain approximately 1.56 billion people—about 19 percent of the world's population, or nearly one person in five. (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2024*, Online Edition, medium-variant population projections for 2026.)

China alone remains one of the most powerful countries in the world, and its current Communist Party constitution states that the Party's "highest ideal and ultimate goal is the realization of communism" and identifies Marxism-Leninism, along with several later Communist doctrines, as its "guides to action." (Constitution of the Communist Party of China, revised October 22, 2022.)

In the West, Marxist thought has developed along intellectual and cultural paths that didn't depend upon Soviet political control, but rather upon influencing universities, law, education, social movements, and other institutions.

Marxism therefore isn't merely an old nineteenth-century theory or a failed twentieth-century government system. Its influence remains highly relevant to the world Christians are living in now.

c. The Devil's Counterfeit

R. G. Lee warned in his famous Pay Day Someday sermon that "the Devil pays only in counterfeit money." Lee wasn't speaking specifically about Marxism. He was warning about Satan's deception generally, but his warning provides an especially useful picture of Marxism.

A counterfeit is dangerous because it resembles something genuine -- and usually desirable.

Marxism speaks about justice, poverty, oppression, equality, community, liberation, and concern for vulnerable people. Those aren't subjects Christians should ignore. God spoke about justice, oppression, poverty, work, property, generosity, government, and care for vulnerable people long before Karl Marx was born.

But Marxism takes those genuine concerns and places them inside a worldview that rejects the God who defines what is true and just.

d. God's People Have Always Confronted False Religions and Rival Worldviews

Some Christians believe we should spread the gospel but avoid directly addressing false religions, philosophies, or ideologies. Scripture gives us a different pattern.

Christians are commanded not only to proclaim the truth, but also to defend it and answer ideas that oppose it. Peter writes:

(1 Pet. 3:15 NASB) "[A]lways being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;"

The word translated “defense” is *apologia*, from which we get the word *apologetics*. Christians should be prepared to explain and defend what we believe.

Paul describes an even more active engagement with false ideas:

(2 Cor. 10:4–5 NASB) “[T]he weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

Paul isn’t speaking about physical violence. Our weapons “are not of the flesh.” The battle includes arguments, ideas, and claims that raise themselves against the knowledge of God. Christians should therefore identify false ideas, answer them, and show where they contradict God’s truth.

First Peter 3:15 also governs how we do that: “with gentleness and reverence.” Biblical confrontation isn’t an excuse for arrogance or needless hostility. But gentleness doesn’t mean silence.

The entire Bible reflects this pattern.

In the Old Testament, Moses didn’t merely tell Israel privately to worship the LORD. God’s confrontation with Pharaoh publicly demonstrated His supremacy over Egypt and its gods (Ex. 5–12). When Israel made the golden calf, Moses directly condemned the false worship (Ex. 32).

Gideon was commanded to tear down his father’s altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah beside it (Judg. 6:25–32).

Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and challenged Israel:

(1 Kings 18:21 NASB) “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”

Elijah didn’t treat Baal worship as something God’s people shouldn’t address because it was another religion. He exposed it as false and called the people back to the true God (1 Kings 18:20–40).

The prophets also attacked false ideas directly. Isaiah exposed the foolishness of idolatry by describing a man who burns part of a piece of wood for fuel and then bows before the remainder as his god (Isa. 44:9–20). Jeremiah contrasted powerless idols with the living God (Jer. 10:1–16).

The New Testament continues the same pattern.

Jesus repeatedly confronted false religious teaching. He rebuked religious leaders for placing human tradition above God’s Word (Matt. 15:1–9), corrected the Sadducees’ error concerning the resurrection (Matt. 22:23–33), and publicly exposed the false teaching and hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23).

Jesus didn't believe love required silence toward religious error.

Paul likewise engaged the religions and philosophies competing with Christianity.

When he entered Athens, his spirit was "being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols" (Acts 17:16 NASB). He therefore reasoned publicly in the synagogue and marketplace and eventually addressed Epicurean and Stoic philosophers at the Areopagus (Acts 17:17–18).

Paul didn't simply present Christianity as one more religious choice. He challenged the assumptions of Athenian religion. The true God created everything, doesn't dwell in temples made by human hands, and cannot properly be represented by images of gold, silver, or stone. Paul then called his listeners to repentance and proclaimed Jesus Christ's resurrection and coming judgment (Acts 17:22–31).

That is exactly the kind of engagement Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 10:5: confronting ideas raised against the knowledge of God.

At Ephesus, Paul's preaching likewise challenged the enormous cult of Artemis. His opponents complained that he had persuaded many people that "gods made with hands are no gods at all" (Acts 19:26 NASB). Christianity necessarily contradicted the surrounding religion because both claims couldn't be true.

Paul also confronted paganism in his letters, explaining the truth about idols and warning Christians against participating in idolatrous worship (1 Cor. 8:4–6; 10:14–22).

He similarly addressed false philosophies and teachings threatening the Church:

(Col. 2:8 NASB) "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men... rather than according to Christ."

The false teaching at Colossae included religious regulations, asceticism, angel worship, visions, and claims to special spiritual insight (Col. 2:8, 16–23). Some of those features resemble ideas that later appeared in Gnosticism.

Paul also warned Timothy about "the opposing arguments of what is falsely called 'knowledge'" (1 Tim. 6:20 NASB). The Greek word translated "knowledge" is *gnōsis*, from which the term *Gnosticism* comes.

John confronted a closely related error when teachers denied the true incarnation of Jesus Christ. He commanded:

(1 John 4:1 NASB) "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God..."

John then made confession that Jesus Christ "has come in the flesh" a test of true doctrine (1 John 4:2–3; see also 2 John 7).

Again, believers weren't told simply to ignore competing religious claims. They were commanded to test them.

The rest of the New Testament is equally direct. Paul warned about "different doctrine," myths, speculation, "doctrines of demons," false asceticism, and people who would turn from truth to myths (1 Tim. 1:3–7; 4:1–5; 6:3–5, 20–21; 2 Tim. 4:3–4).

Jude commanded Christians to "contend earnestly for the faith" because false teachers had entered the Church (Jude 3–4 NASB). Peter devoted much of 2 Peter 2 to exposing false teachers. Paul required an elder to be able both to teach sound doctrine and "refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9 NASB).

The biblical pattern is unmistakable. God's people proclaim truth and answer falsehood.

That doesn't mean Christians should become quarrelsome, insulting, or obsessed with every false idea. Paul says the Lord's servant "must not be quarrelsome" and should correct opponents with gentleness (2 Tim. 2:24–25 NASB). Peter likewise requires "gentleness and reverence" when we defend the faith (1 Pet. 3:15 NASB).

Again, gentleness isn't silence.

Nor does preaching the gospel mean refusing to address ideas that compete with it. Paul preached Christ while reasoning with philosophers, confronting idolatry, refuting false teachers, and warning Christians against rival worldviews.

That principle is especially important when considering Marxism.

Marxism isn't a religion in the ordinary sense because it rejects God. But it functions as a comprehensive rival worldview. It offers its own explanation of mankind, evil, oppression, guilt, justice, liberation, social transformation, and ultimate hope.

As we'll see, it supplies counterfeit answers to many of the same fundamental questions Christianity answers, but without the Creator, without biblical sin, without reconciliation with God, and without Jesus Christ.

In that sense, Marxism functions much like a secular religion—a counterfeit system of meaning, guilt, liberation, and hope.

Christians therefore shouldn't imagine that addressing Marxism distracts us from defending Christianity. When a competing worldview raises arguments against the knowledge of God and offers counterfeit answers to questions God has already answered, Scripture gives us every reason to examine and answer it (2 Cor. 10:4–5; Col. 2:8; Jude 3).

The biblical pattern isn't: preach the truth and ignore the counterfeit.

It is: know the truth, proclaim the truth, defend the truth, expose the counterfeit, and point people to Jesus Christ.

e. Why So Many Christians Underestimate the Danger of Marxism

One reason Marxism remains dangerous is that many Christians no longer consider it dangerous.

For those who lived through much of the Cold War, names such as Stalin, Mao, Castro, the Soviet Union, the Berlin Wall, the Gulag, and the Cultural Revolution may still carry an immediate meaning.

But an increasingly large portion of the American population has no personal memory of the Soviet Union at all. Others were children when it collapsed.

As the events themselves become more distant, Marxism can sound like an old argument their parents or grandparents had rather than an ideology Christians need to understand today.

There's also a tendency to assume that warnings about Communism were largely disproved because some anti-Communists (e.g., Joseph McCarthy) made excessive or unsupported accusations.

As will be explained more below, however, subsequent evidence has amply established that Communist penetration and Soviet espionage in America were **not** imaginary.

Later access to Soviet records has changed historians' understanding of relationships between American Communists and Moscow.

We'll examine that evidence, along with Communist activities in America, Soviet active measures, Yuri Bezmenov's warnings about ideological subversion, the Frankfurt School, the New Left, Critical Legal Studies, Critical Race Theory, and related developments.

e. We Need the Facts Before Applying I.R.A.C.P.

This study has established a method for biblical discernment. We identify the **I**ssue, determine the biblical **R**ule, carefully **A**nalyze how Scripture applies to the facts, reach a **C**onclusion, and consider the **P**olicy, that is, the wisdom and goodness behind God's way.

But there's an important reason we aren't beginning Marxism immediately with the I.R.A.C.P. analysis. We first need to know what we're analyzing. Only after those basic facts are before us will we subject Marxism to God's Word through the I.R.A.C.P. method.

2. WHAT IS MARXISM?

Before we examine what Marxism hath wrought, we need to understand what Marx and Engels actually taught.

a. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

Marxism takes its name from Karl Marx (1818–1883), a German philosopher, economist, political writer, and revolutionary who developed his ideas in close cooperation with Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). Marx and Engels worked together for decades, corresponding extensively and jointly producing some of the foundational writings of Communism.

Engels later said Marx's key idea was that the prevailing mode of economic production and the resulting social organization form the foundation of political and intellectual history, and that history since primitive communal society has been characterized by class struggle. (Friedrich Engels, Preface to the English Edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [1888].)

Marx died in 1883, while Engels lived until 1895 and continued editing, publishing, and defending their ideas.

b. The Foundational Marxist Writings

Marx and Engels published *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848. Though relatively short, it became one of the foundational documents of international Communism.

The Manifesto presents the basic Marxist understanding of class conflict, capitalism, revolution, private property, political power, and the future Communist society. Its purpose wasn't merely to analyze capitalism. It was openly revolutionary.

Marx later developed his economic arguments much more extensively in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Volume I was first published in German in 1867. Marx died before completing the remaining volumes for publication, so Engels edited Marx's manuscripts and published Volume II in 1885 and Volume III in 1894. (Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I [1867]; Vol. II [1885]; Vol. III [1894].)

Together, these writings supplied much of the theoretical foundation upon which later Marxist movements built.

c. Marx's Materialist Understanding of History

One of Marxism's central ideas is that we can understand human history largely by examining material and economic conditions, especially how people produce what they need and how society is organized around that production.

The Communist Manifesto therefore begins its historical argument with the famous statement: "The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles."

Marx and Engels describe history as a succession of class conflicts between groups, such as freeman and slave, lord and serf, and other opposing classes. They argue that modern society was increasingly divided into “two great hostile camps”: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [1848], pt. I.)

d. Bourgeoisie and Proletariat

The **bourgeoisie** are the people who own businesses, factories, land, and other major sources of production.

The **proletariat** are the workers who earn wages by working for them.

Marx believed these two groups were naturally in conflict because business owners made profits from the labor of workers. He expected workers eventually to recognize their common interests, organize politically, and struggle against the owners.

The Manifesto says that “every class struggle is a political struggle” (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [1848], pt. I.).

For Marx and Engels, the goal wasn’t simply higher wages or better working conditions. It was to change the entire social and economic system.

e. Revolution and the Forcible Overthrow of the Existing Order

This part of Marxism is especially important because revolutionary violence wasn’t something later Communists simply invented and attached to an otherwise peaceful Marx. The revolutionary language is already present in *The Communist Manifesto*.

Marx and Engels describe the developing class struggle as eventually breaking into “**open revolution**,” followed by the “**violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie**.” (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [1848], pt. I.)

In Part II, they state that the immediate Communist objective includes overthrowing bourgeois supremacy and obtaining political power for the proletariat.

The Manifesto concludes even more explicitly. Marx and Engels say Communists support revolutionary movements against the existing social and political order and openly declare that their aims can be achieved through the “**forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions**.” (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [1848], pt. IV.)

That fact matters when we later consider Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Castro, and other Communist revolutionaries.

Lenin didn’t invent the idea that the existing social order should be overthrown. Revolutionary class conflict and forcible overthrow already appeared in one of Marxism’s foundational documents.

Marx didn't maintain that violent revolution would necessarily be required in every nation under every circumstance. Speaking after the Hague Congress in 1872, he said that workers in countries such as America, England, and possibly Holland might be able to attain their objectives peacefully because of their political institutions. At the same time, he said that in most continental European countries "force" would be necessary. (Karl Marx, speech in Amsterdam following the Hague Congress, September 8, 1872.)

f. Private Property and Economic Centralization

Marx and Engels summarize Communist theory as the "**abolition of private property**," meaning bourgeois private property and the capitalist system built upon it. (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [1848], pt. II.)

Their revolutionary program also called for major economic centralization. Once the proletariat gained political power, it would take capital from the bourgeoisie and place major instruments of production under state control, requiring what Marx and Engels called "**despotic inroads**" on existing property rights.

Among the measures they proposed were:

- abolition of property in land and use of land rents for public purposes;
- a heavily progressive income tax;
- abolition of inheritance rights;
- confiscation of property belonging to emigrants and rebels;
- centralization of credit through a state-controlled national bank;
- centralization of transportation and communication; and
- expansion of state-owned factories and production.

(Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [1848], pt. II.)

g. Marx's View of God and Religion

Marxism's conflict with Christianity runs much deeper than economics.

Marx rejected the Christian understanding that God created mankind and revealed Himself to us. Instead, he adopted an irreligious, materialist understanding in which religion arises from human beings and their social circumstances.

Marx wrote: "The foundation of irreligious criticism is: **Man makes religion, religion does not make man.**" (Karl Marx, "Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" [1844].)

Marx understood religion as an expression of humanity's alienated condition. His famous description is that religion is "**the opium of the people.**" In the surrounding passage, he acknowledges that religion can express real suffering and provide consolation to suffering people, but he still regards it as an illusion arising from an alienated world. (Karl Marx, "Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" [1844].)

Marx then argued that the **abolition of religion** as humanity's illusory happiness **is necessary** for people to seek real happiness. In his view, changing the material and social conditions producing religious alienation would eventually make religion unnecessary. Modern scholarship on Marx likewise describes his view as one in which religion would ultimately "wither away" once material alienation had been overcome. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Karl Marx," Section 1.2, "Religion and Work.")

That is fundamentally different from Christianity.

Christianity says God made man (Gen. 1:27; Acts 17:24–26). Marx said man makes religion.

Christianity says our Creator is the ultimate reality around whom human life must be ordered (Col. 1:16–17; Acts 17:28). Marx placed humanity and material social existence at the center.

Christianity says mankind needs reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:10–11; 2 Cor. 5:18–20). Marx treated religion itself as part of mankind's alienated condition.

We'll examine the biblical implications later. For now, it's enough to recognize that hostility between Marxism and Christianity isn't an accidental disagreement that appeared only after Lenin or Stalin. It was cooked into the original recipe.

h. Marxism Is a Comprehensive Worldview

The Communist Manifesto discusses not only factories, wages, and property, but also government, law, morality, religion, family, education, culture, nationality, political power, and revolutionary social transformation.

Marx and Engels argued that prevailing ideas are deeply connected with prevailing material and class relationships. They treated law, morality, religion, and other traditional ideas as historically conditioned rather than as unchanging truths standing above society.

The Manifesto describes Communist revolution as involving not only a radical break with traditional property relations but also a radical break with traditional ideas as a whole. (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [1848], pt. II.)

Marxism therefore offers an entire way of interpreting the world.

i. One Dark Family With Different Branches

Marxism didn't remain frozen in 1848. Later thinkers and revolutionaries adapted Marx's ideas to different countries and circumstances.

Lenin developed Marxism-Leninism and a revolutionary party strategy suited to Russia.

Stalin built his system upon the Soviet Marxist-Leninist state.

Mao Zedong adapted Marxist-Leninist revolution to Chinese conditions, especially by emphasizing the revolutionary potential of the peasantry.

Western Marxists later developed other forms of Marxist analysis that placed greater emphasis upon culture, psychology, ideology, and social institutions.

In short: classical Marxism, Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, Western Marxism, and later Marxist adaptations are different branches of **the same dark family**.

We now know enough about the theory to ask the next question. What happened when Marxism acquired the political power to put these ideas into practice?

3. THE HISTORICAL FRUIT OF MARXISM

Jesus said:

(Matt. 7:16 NASB) “You will know them by their fruits.”

Marxist governments arose in different nations, cultures, and circumstances, but similar patterns appeared again and again: concentrated political power, confiscation, collectivization, censorship, secret police, political imprisonment, forced labor, deportation, famine, execution, and suppression of opposition.

The details differed from country to country, but the human cost was enormous.

a. Lenin and Soviet Russia

The first major Marxist revolution occurred in Russia. In October 1917, Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks seized power and began constructing the world’s first lasting Communist state.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks suppressed political opponents, concentrated authority in the Communist Party, governed by decree, and increasingly used terror to maintain control. (Library of Congress, Revelations from the Russian Archives, “Internal Workings of the Soviet Union.”)

The secret police became an important instrument of that control almost immediately. The Cheka was established in December 1917 and soon exercised enormous power against those regarded as enemies of the revolution. Marxism had moved from revolutionary theory into government, and coercion quickly became part of the effort to destroy opposition and transform society.

b. Stalin and the Soviet Union

After Lenin’s death in 1924, Joseph Stalin gradually consolidated enormous personal power and carried Soviet repression much further.

Beginning in the late 1920s, Stalin forced agriculture into collective farms while rapidly industrializing the Soviet economy.

Approximately one million so-called kulak households—about five million people—were deported during collectivization. The disruption of agriculture contributed to catastrophic famine, while private ownership was almost entirely eliminated from Soviet agriculture. (Library of Congress, Revelations from the Russian Archives, “Collectivization and Industrialization.”)

Stalin also turned the machinery of repression against political opponents, Communist Party members, intellectuals, ethnic groups, and ordinary citizens. During the purges, millions of people labeled “**enemies of the people**” were imprisoned, exiled, sent to labor camps, or shot.

The **Gulag** became an enormous system of prisons and forced-labor camps, while deportation was used against individuals and entire populations. (Library of Congress, Revelations from the Russian Archives, “Repression and Terror” and “Deportations”; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Josef Stalin.”)

The government Marxists expected eventually to become unnecessary had instead become extraordinarily powerful.

c. Communist Eastern Europe

After World War II, Communist governments came to dominate much of Eastern Europe under Soviet influence. Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, and other countries found themselves governed by Communist parties operating within a Soviet-dominated political and military system.

When people resisted, Communist power was used to keep those governments in place. Soviet forces crushed resistance in East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Communist governments throughout the region used censorship, surveillance, political police, imprisonment, and restrictions upon opposition to maintain control.

Most of these governments finally collapsed in 1989, followed by the Soviet Union itself in 1991. Their collapse came only after decades of Communist political domination.

d. North Korea

Following World War II, the Korean Peninsula was divided between Soviet and American occupation zones. The Soviet Union helped establish a Communist government in the North under Kim Il Sung, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was formally established in 1948.

In June 1950, North Korean forces invaded South Korea, beginning the Korean War.

North Korea later developed its own **Juche ideology** and an extraordinary personality cult surrounding the **Kim dynasty**, so its present system isn’t identical to classical Marxism. Nevertheless, it arose from Soviet-backed Communism and developed into one of the most totalitarian governments in the modern world.

The human consequences have been severe. The United Nations Commission of Inquiry concluded in 2014 that North Korean authorities had committed crimes against humanity, including murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, persecution, enforced disappearance, and knowingly causing prolonged starvation. At the time of its investigation, the Commission estimated that roughly 80,000 to 120,000 people remained in political prison camps. (United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea [2014].)

North Korea also suffered a devastating famine during the 1990s. Precise estimates vary because reliable information from the closed country is difficult to obtain, but a widely cited demographic study estimated approximately 600,000 to one million famine-related deaths between 1995 and 2000. (Daniel Goodkind and Loraine West, "The North Korean Famine and Its Demographic Impact," *Population and Development Review* 27 [2001].)

North Korea's persecution of Christianity deserves separate treatment and will be considered in the next major section.

e. Maoist China

Marxism also produced its largest political experiment in China. Under **Mao Zedong**, the Chinese Communist Party defeated its rivals and established the People's Republic of China in 1949. Mao adapted Marxism-Leninism to Chinese conditions, especially by emphasizing the revolutionary role of peasants.

The consequences became catastrophic during the **Great Leap Forward**, Mao's attempt beginning in 1958 to collectivize agriculture while forcing extremely rapid industrial and economic development.

The resulting **Great Chinese Famine** lasted from roughly 1959 to 1961. Douglas Almond's study in *The Oxford Companion to the Economics of China* estimates that approximately **thirty million people died** and identifies the Great Leap Forward's breakneck development program as the cause of the famine. (Douglas Almond, "The Great Chinese Famine," *The Oxford Companion to the Economics of China* [Oxford University Press, 2014].)

That catastrophe didn't end Mao's revolutionary experiments. In 1966, Mao launched the **Cultural Revolution**, mobilizing young Red Guards against people and institutions accused of bourgeois, traditional, or counter-revolutionary thinking. Universities were disrupted, professors and officials were publicly humiliated, traditional institutions were attacked, and political persecution spread throughout the country.

Modern research using thousands of Chinese county and city records estimates that the Cultural Revolution caused approximately **1.1 to 1.6 million deaths** and made another 22 to 30 million people direct victims of political persecution. (Andrew G. Walder, "Rebellion and Repression in China, 1966–1971," *Social Science History* 38 [2014]: 513–539.)

The Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution show how quickly ideological certainty combined with concentrated government power can produce human catastrophe.

f. Vietnam, American Sacrifice, and the Domino Theory

Communism's advance through Vietnam took decades. Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Communist movement established control in North Vietnam, while South Vietnam remained a separate anti-Communist state.

The United States became deeply involved because American policy sought to preserve "an independent non-Communist South Vietnam" and prevent Communist conquest of the South. (U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961–1963, vol. IV, doc. 331; 1964–1968, vol. I, doc. 84.)

About 2.7 million Americans served in Vietnam. More than 58,000 U.S. servicemembers died, and more than 300,000 were wounded. Many never came home, while others returned with lasting physical and psychological wounds. (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, "Vietnam Era Veterans—Facts and Demographics"; National Archives, "Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics.")

Their service in Vietnam was part of the larger American effort to contain Communism, just as American troops had earlier fought to prevent Communist North Korea from conquering South Korea.

On April 30, 1975, after direct American military involvement had ended, North Vietnamese forces captured Saigon. Vietnam was subsequently forcibly reunified under Communist Party rule.

Communist victory wasn't followed by national reconciliation. Hundreds of thousands of South Vietnamese were ordered into "**reeducation camps**," where political indoctrination was combined with hard labor, while many others were relocated into "new economic zones." A massive refugee exodus followed, producing the tragedy remembered as the Vietnamese "boat people." (Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, *Vietnam: A Country Study* [1989].)

g. Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge

Cambodia provides one of the most horrifying examples of Marxist revolutionary rule.

The Communist **Khmer Rouge** seized control of Cambodia in April 1975. Its leaders attempted to remake the country into a self-sufficient, classless agrarian society by emptying cities, destroying existing social arrangements, abolishing ordinary economic life, and forcing millions of people into agricultural labor.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum reports that nearly **two million Cambodians died** between 1975 and 1979 through execution, starvation, disease, exhaustion, and forced labor. The regime's attempt to create its new society produced what became known throughout the world as the "**killing fields**." (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Cambodia, 1975–1979.")

One of the most disturbing memorials remains at Choeung Ek outside Phnom Penh. The site contains what is known as the “**Killing Tree**,” where children were killed by Khmer Rouge executioners.

Memorial and Documentation Center of Cambodia materials preserve testimony and documentary evidence concerning the victims of the Khmer Rouge. At Choeung Ek, the Killing Tree remains as a physical reminder that revolutionary violence didn’t stop with political leaders or soldiers; even children became victims of the regime. (Documentation Center of Cambodia, archival and survivor-testimony collections; Choeung Ek Genocidal Center, official audio-tour materials.)

Cambodia had only a fraction of the population of China or the Soviet Union, which makes the scale even more shocking: **approximately one-quarter of the population died in less than four years.**

h. Cuba and Other Marxist Governments

After coming to power in Cuba in 1959, **Fidel Castro** increasingly aligned his government with Communism and the Soviet Union. In December 1961, he publicly declared himself a Marxist-Leninist and said he would remain one for the rest of his life.

Cuba developed into a one-party Communist system whose political, economic, military, and security institutions were organized along Marxist-Leninist lines. (U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, vol. X, doc. 349.)

Cuba was only one part of a much wider expansion.

Marxist governments and revolutionary movements appeared in Vietnam, Laos, North Korea, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, parts of Africa and Latin America, and elsewhere.

They differed greatly in culture and circumstance, but Marxist-Leninist ideas repeatedly supplied the framework through which revolutionary parties claimed authority to reconstruct society.

i. The Recurring Pattern

When these histories are placed beside one another, a disturbing pattern becomes difficult to ignore.

Marxist movements promised liberation from oppression, yet once they obtained sufficient power, political authority repeatedly became concentrated in a Communist Party claiming to act for the people.

Property was confiscated or collectivized, opposition was suppressed, information was censored, secret police monitored dissent, and people classified as enemies of the revolution could be imprisoned, deported, sent to labor camps, or killed.

Again and again, Marxist revolution was followed by concentrated political power, economic coercion, ideological control, suppression of opposition, imprisonment, forced labor, and enormous human suffering.

The question therefore becomes increasingly difficult to avoid: when versions of the same worldview are applied in different countries and repeatedly produce similar concentrations of power and repression, how many times can every catastrophe be dismissed as having nothing to do with the worldview itself?

j. The Overall Human Cost - The Black Book of Communism

One of the most ambitious attempts to measure that worldwide human cost is *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*. Originally published in France in 1997, the English edition was published by Harvard University Press in 1999.

The 858-page volume drew heavily upon archives that became available after Communist governments collapsed and attempted to document Communist terror, torture, forced labor, famine, deportation, massacre, and repression throughout the world. (Stéphane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* [Harvard University Press, 1999].)

In his introduction, editor Stéphane Courtois gave a rough worldwide estimate approaching **one hundred million deaths**. His breakdown included approximately 20 million in the Soviet Union, 65 million in Communist China, two million in North Korea, two million in Cambodia, one million in Vietnam, one million in Eastern Europe, 1.7 million in Africa, 1.5 million in Afghanistan, and 150,000 in Latin America. (Stéphane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism* [1999], introduction.)

The exact worldwide total has been debated, including disagreements over how some famine, wartime, and indirectly caused deaths should be counted. Accuracy requires acknowledging those debates, but they must not be used to make the victims disappear.

Even without relying upon Courtois's entire worldwide total, **independent evidence establishes catastrophes involving tens of millions of people**.

The Great Chinese Famine alone killed around **thirty million** according to major scholarly estimates. Stalin's collectivization, famine, purges, camps, and deportations killed millions. Nearly two million Cambodians died under the Khmer Rouge, while North Korea's Communist system suffered a later famine that killed hundreds of thousands.

Death totals also tell only part of the story. They don't count everyone who survived years in a labor camp, lost a farm or home through confiscation, was driven into exile, endured torture or political imprisonment, watched relatives disappear, or learned that expressing the wrong belief could destroy a career or family.

The Black Book itself runs 858 pages, and even that enormous volume doesn't exhaust the subject. What we have considered here is only the tip of a vast historical iceberg.

Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16 NASB). The historical fruit of Marxism demands serious attention.

One particular fruit deserves separate treatment from Christians because it appeared repeatedly across Communist governments and continues in some places today: **Marxism’s persecution of Christianity.**

4. MARXISM’S PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANITY

Marxism’s persecution of Christianity deserves separate attention because it wasn’t merely an unfortunate side effect of Communist government.

The conflict reaches back into the worldview itself. Marx rejected Christianity’s understanding of God, mankind, sin, and salvation, while Communist governments repeatedly treated independent religious belief as a rival source of authority.

In some countries the goal was openly to eliminate religion; in others, governments sought to control, weaken, infiltrate, or subordinate churches to the state.

a. The Conflict Begins With God

As we’ve already seen, Marx rejected the Christian belief that God created mankind and revealed Himself to us. He wrote, “The foundation of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man,” and described religion as “the opium of the people.” He ultimately argued that religion should disappear as mankind overcame the social conditions that produced it. (Karl Marx, “Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” [1844].)

Christianity begins from the opposite direction:

(Gen. 1:1 NASB) “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Christianity says God made man. Marx said man makes religion.

Christianity sees God as the Creator and ultimate authority over mankind, while Marxism explains mankind and society without Him.

That disagreement isn’t secondary.

If Christianity is true, Marxism is wrong at its foundation. God isn’t an illusion produced by social conditions, and Christianity isn’t simply something mankind must outgrow.

That helps explain why the conflict between Marxism and Christianity repeatedly became much more than an academic disagreement once Marxists gained political power.

b. Jesus Is Lord - The State Is Not

Christianity also places a permanent limit upon government authority. Paul writes concerning Jesus Christ:

(Phil. 2:10-11 NASB) "[A]t the name of Jesus 'every knee will bow,' ... and ... every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Christians are commanded to respect legitimate government authority (Rom. 13:1-7), but government is never God. When rulers command what God forbids or forbid what God commands, the Christian principle remains: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29 NASB).

That creates a serious problem for a totalitarian political system.

A Christian may obey the government, pay taxes, respect officials, and seek the good of his country, but he can never give the state his highest allegiance. Jesus Christ remains Lord over the Party, the dictator, the revolution, and the government itself.

Communist governments therefore repeatedly viewed independent Christianity with suspicion. A church that answers ultimately to Christ possesses an authority the Party doesn't control, a moral standard the Party didn't create, and a community that can exist independently of the state.

c. The Soviet War Against Christianity

The Soviet record clearly demonstrates how serious that conflict could become.

The Library of Congress, using formerly secret Soviet archives, states that the Soviet Union was the first state to make the elimination of religion an ideological objective. The Communist government confiscated church property, ridiculed religion, harassed believers, promoted atheism in schools, closed theological schools, and prohibited church publications. (Library of Congress, Revelations from the Russian Archives, "Anti-religious Campaigns.")

The Russian Orthodox Church, as the country's largest religious body, became the principal target during the anti-religious campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s.

The Library of Congress reports that **nearly all** of its clergy and many believers were **shot or sent to labor camps**. By 1939, only about 500 of more than 50,000 Russian Orthodox churches remained open. (Library of Congress, Revelations from the Russian Archives, "Anti-religious Campaigns.")

The persecution wasn't limited to Orthodox Christians. Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, and other religious communities also suffered confiscation, suppression, imprisonment, or strict government control.

By 1941, for example, only two of almost 1,200 Roman Catholic churches that had existed before the Revolution remained active in the Soviet Union. Protestant denominations were likewise persecuted and later forced to operate within tightly restricted government-approved structures. (Library of Congress, *Revelations from the Russian Archives*, “Anti-religious Campaigns.”)

The Soviet archives also show that this persecution reached the highest levels of government.

In a March 19, 1922 letter to Molotov for members of the Politburo, Lenin urged a ruthless campaign against clergy resisting the confiscation of church valuables, including shooting large numbers of what he called reactionary clergy. This wasn’t merely local officials going beyond Communist policy; anti-religious repression was directed from the highest levels of the Soviet government. (Library of Congress, *Revelations from the Russian Archives*, “Anti-religious Campaigns,” Lenin to Molotov, March 19, 1922.)

Soviet policy changed at different times. Stalin temporarily relaxed some restrictions during World War II when he needed patriotic support, but later governments renewed anti-religious campaigns.

Even where churches were allowed to remain open, Communist authorities often sought to control them through approved leaders and security services. The goal could shift from destroying the church outright to making sure that whatever church remained could not challenge Communist authority.

d. Persecution Across Communist Nations

The Soviet Union wasn't an isolated case. Similar conflicts appeared throughout the Communist world, although the methods and severity varied.

In **Romania**, Communist authorities restricted religious teaching, interfered in church affairs, pressured churches to submit to the regime, and imprisoned Christians who refused to cooperate. Romanian pastor **Richard Wurmbrand**’s firsthand experience of imprisonment and torture will be considered in the next section.

Communist **Albania** went even further. In 1967, the government launched a violent campaign to extinguish religious life. Churches, mosques, monasteries, and other religious institutions were closed or converted to secular uses, religious practice was banned, and Albania proclaimed itself the world’s first atheist state. The Communist regime maintained a total ban on religious observance for years. (Library of Congress, *Albania: A Country Study*.)

Maoist **China** likewise brought Christianity under intense pressure. After the Communist victory, Protestant churches were forced to sever many foreign relationships and operate through the state-controlled **Three-Self Patriotic Movement**.

Church leaders who resisted state control were purged or imprisoned, while Christians often continued worship through underground networks during the most severe Maoist years.

Cuba's government continues to regulate religious organizations through a system that gives the Communist Party extensive control over religious activity.

In 2026, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom reported continuing surveillance in Cuba, as well as fines, intimidation, enforced exile, and other pressure against religious leaders and practitioners, especially those operating outside government-approved structures. (USCIRF, Cuba Country Update [2026].)

The Communist Party of **Vietnam** permits officially recognized religious activity while closely regulating and controlling religious affairs through state-sponsored organizations. USCIRF reported in 2026 that unregistered religious groups and predominantly Christian ethnic minorities continued to face surveillance, harassment, detention, disruption of worship, physical abuse, and pressure to renounce their faith or join state-approved organizations. (USCIRF, *2026 Annual Report*, Vietnam.)

The methods differ—from total prohibition in Communist Albania to tightly managed religious organizations in present-day Vietnam and Cuba—but the recurring principle is recognizable: independent religious authority is treated as something the Communist state must eliminate, restrict, or bring under control.

e. North Korea

North Korea represents one of the most extreme present-day examples.

As discussed earlier, North Korea developed from a Soviet-backed Marxist-Leninist Communist system. Juche, extreme nationalism, and the personality cult surrounding the Kim dynasty became central features of the regime.

In North Korea, Christianity is treated as a grave political threat because it gives allegiance to God rather than the Kim family and state ideology.

Current USCIRF records document North Koreans receiving indefinite imprisonment in political prison camps for possessing Bibles, studying Scripture, participating in underground churches, or otherwise engaging in Christian activity. In some cases family members, including children, were imprisoned along with the accused. (USCIRF, Religious Prisoners of Conscience database.)

Earlier USCIRF investigations also collected testimony describing Christians being tortured and executed because of their faith. One witness reported seeing a man with whom he had studied the Bible publicly executed after being returned to North Korea, while another described an entire family being sent to a political prison camp after authorities discovered a Bible in their home. (USCIRF, *2009 White Paper on Religious Freedom in North Korea*.)

USCIRF continues in 2026 to recommend North Korea for designation as a Country of Particular Concern because of its severe violations of religious freedom.

f. Communist China Today

China demonstrates perhaps most clearly that Marxist control of Christianity is not simply history.

The Chinese Communist Party **still** officially identifies itself with Marxism, and under Xi Jinping it has increasingly pursued what it calls the “**sinicization of religion**.”

USCIRF describes that policy as the complete subordination of religious groups to the Communist Party’s political agenda and Marxist vision of religion. Churches and other religious bodies are expected to demonstrate political loyalty to the CCP, incorporate Party ideology into religious life, and operate through government-controlled organizations. (USCIRF, *Sinicization of Religion: China’s Coercive Religious Policy*.)

The effect upon Christians is substantial. Protestant house churches that refuse government control can face closure, surveillance, detention, and prosecution. Catholic and Protestant organizations that operate legally must do so within structures whose leadership and activities remain subject to government regulation.

This pressure has intensified rather than disappeared. USCIRF’s 2026 Annual Report states that Chinese authorities continued seeking extensive control over religion during 2025 and further expanded regulations limiting religious activity, including online religious activity outside government-approved channels.

In May 2026, USCIRF reported that the CCP had “systematically intensified” restrictions through new laws expanding its sinicization policy. (USCIRF, “China’s Codification and Escalation of the ‘Sinicization of Religion,’” May 11, 2026.)

The terminology has changed since Lenin, and China combines Communist political control with extensive market activity, but the basic conflict remains: religious belief is tolerated only to the extent that it remains subordinate to Communist Party authority.

That should matter greatly to Christians who assume Marxism’s war against independent Christianity ended with the Soviet Union. **It didn’t.**

g. The Spiritual Dimension - The Devil and Karl Marx

There’s also a deeper question for a Christian study of discernment: Should Marxism be viewed merely as a mistaken political philosophy, or is there a spiritual dimension behind it?

Paul Kengor addresses that question directly in *The Devil and Karl Marx: Communism’s Long March of Death, Deception, and Infiltration*.

Kengor argues that Marxism can’t be understood adequately apart from Marx’s hostility toward religion, the dark spiritual imagery found in some of Marx’s early writings, and the systematic warfare against Christianity that later accompanied Communist governments. (Paul Kengor, *The Devil and Karl Marx* [TAN Books, 2020].)

In Marx's youthful poem "The Fiddler," for example, written in 1837 and preserved in the Marx-Engels Collected Works, the fictional speaker declares, "With Satan I have struck my deal." The poem also contains imagery of hell, death, and destruction. (Karl Marx, "The Fiddler" [1837], Marx-Engels Collected Works, vol. 1.)

Marx eventually became an outspoken atheist and critic of Christianity. The political movement built from his ideas repeatedly attacked churches and believers. Communist regimes killed, imprisoned, tortured, censored, and attempted to reeducate millions, while Christianity was frequently treated as an enemy.

Scripture teaches that Satan works through lies, false teaching, hatred, deception, and ideas raised against the knowledge of God. An atheistic worldview that rejects the Creator, seeks to displace Christianity, and has repeatedly produced enormous human destruction is therefore properly examined within the biblical framework of spiritual warfare.

Whether Marx himself consciously understood that spiritual dimension is a separate question. The more important Christian question is whether the ideology and its fruit bear the marks Scripture tells us to recognize.

h. Marx, Engels, and Charles Spurgeon

In April 1868, Friedrich Engels completed a personal questionnaire preserved in the album of Marx's daughter, Jenny. When asked, "The characters you most dislike," Engels gave a single answer: "Spurgeon." This refers to the great English Baptist preacher Charles H. Spurgeon.

The document appears in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Volume 43, page 541, under "Frederick Engels' Confession."

The contrast between the men is striking.

Marx and Engels were developing a revolutionary answer to industrial society. In London, Marx lectured on political economy before workers at the Communist Laborers' Educational Club in Great Windmill Street, and in 1864 he became deeply involved in the International Working Men's Association, founded at St. Martin's Hall. (Wilhelm Liebknecht, "Biographical Memoirs of Karl Marx" [1896]; Karl Marx, *Inaugural Address of the International Working Men's Association* [1864].)

At the same time, Spurgeon was preaching the gospel from the Metropolitan Tabernacle in Newington, which opened in 1861. His answer to poverty and human suffering wasn't class warfare, but rather conversion to Christ joined with practical Christian compassion.

By 1884, ministries associated with Spurgeon reportedly numbered sixty-six and included orphan care, housing for poor widows, clothing assistance, street missions, ministries to the blind, and other efforts to relieve suffering throughout London. (Alex DiPrima, "Spurgeon and the Poor," spurgeon.org)

In his 1888 sermon "No Compromise," Spurgeon warned that spiritual religion was being pushed aside "to make way for entertainments, and Socialism, and politics of varying shades." (C. H. Spurgeon, "No Compromise" [1888].)

Within the same city of London and generation, Marx and Spurgeon therefore represented radically different answers to human suffering.

Marx looked toward class struggle and revolutionary social transformation. Spurgeon proclaimed that people needed new hearts through Jesus Christ and then demonstrated Christian love through extensive care for the poor, widows, children, and others in need.

One promised liberation through revolution. The other proclaimed liberation through Christ.

5. WITNESSES - LISTEN TO THOSE WHO LIVED IT

Statistics tell us the scale of Marxist suffering, but statistics can become distant. Millions of deaths, prisoners, deportees, and famine victims are difficult to comprehend until we remember that every number represents an actual person with a family, a home, hopes, fears, and a life that mattered.

We should therefore listen to people who actually lived under Communist systems.

a. Richard Wurmbrand - Tortured for Christ

Richard Wurmbrand (1909-2001) was an evangelical pastor in Romania when the Communist government began bringing churches under its control. Rather than submit his Christian witness to the Communist state, Wurmbrand helped develop an underground ministry and continued preaching the gospel.

Romanian secret police arrested Wurmbrand in 1948. He eventually spent a total of fourteen years in Communist prisons, including three years in solitary confinement, and endured repeated torture because of his Christian ministry. His wife, Sabina, was also imprisoned for three years and subjected to forced labor. (Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ; The Voice of the Martyrs*, "Our Founders.")

In 1966, Wurmbrand testified before a U.S. Senate subcommittee investigating Communist exploitation of religion. During the hearing, he removed his shirt and showed the senators the scars covering his body from Communist torture. He identified scars from knives, beatings, and other abuse and told the committee that he was showing them "the tortured body of my country, of my fatherland, and of my church." (U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Communist Exploitation of Religion: Testimony of Rev. Richard Wurmbrand*, May 6, 1966.)

Wurmbrand's book, *Tortured for Christ*, shows what Communist persecution looked like from inside the prison cell. The government wasn't merely disagreeing with him about economic policy; his offense was refusing to stop worshiping Christ, preaching the gospel, and serving a church that recognized Jesus rather than the Communist Party as its highest authority.

After leaving Romania, Wurmbrand devoted much of the rest of his life to telling Western Christians about believers suffering behind the Iron Curtain. He and Sabina eventually founded the ministry that became **The Voice of the Martyrs**. Their testimony reminds us that Communist persecution wasn't theoretical. Christians actually endured imprisonment, forced labor, torture, separation from their families, and sometimes death because they wouldn't surrender their allegiance to Christ.

b. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn - The Gulag Archipelago and "Live Not by Lies"

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn gives us another view from inside the Communist system. He served as a Soviet Army officer during World War II, but in 1945 he was arrested for criticizing Stalin in private correspondence and sentenced to eight years in prisons and labor camps followed by internal exile. Those experiences eventually became the foundation for some of the most important writings exposing Soviet repression.

His greatest work on the subject, *The Gulag Archipelago*, wasn't simply a personal prison memoir. Solzhenitsyn combined his own experiences with testimony from 227 other witnesses in what he called an "experiment in literary investigation." The result exposed the vast Soviet system of arrests, interrogations, prisons, forced-labor camps, informants, secret police, and ideological repression. (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*.)

Solzhenitsyn understood that totalitarianism seeks control not only over what people do but also over what they're willing to say and believe. He addressed that problem directly in his short essay, "**Live Not by Lies**," released on February 12, 1974, the day Soviet authorities arrested him before expelling him from the country.

Solzhenitsyn's message was simple but powerful: ordinary people may not possess the power immediately to overthrow an oppressive system, but they can refuse to cooperate with its lies. They can refuse to repeat what they know is false, sign statements they don't believe, or pretend that obvious falsehoods are true merely because telling the truth has become costly. (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Live Not by Lies" [1974].)

That warning reaches far beyond the Soviet Union. An ideological system gains power when ordinary people become accustomed to saying what they're expected to say instead of what they know to be true. Christians should immediately recognize the spiritual importance of that principle because Jesus called Satan "the father of lies" (John 8:44 CSB).

Solzhenitsyn therefore gives us both a record of what Communist repression became and a warning about how people should respond to ideological falsehood.

We'll return to that warning when considering Marxist influence in America and what Christians should do about it.

c. Whittaker Chambers - Former American Communist

Whittaker Chambers offers a different kind of testimony because he experienced Communism first as one of its committed believers.

Chambers joined the American Communist movement in 1925 and later became involved in the Soviet underground and an espionage network operating in Washington. He broke with Communism in 1938 and later became one of the central witnesses exposing Communist espionage in the United States. (Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* [Random House, 1952].)

His memoir, *Witness*, is important because Chambers eventually came to understand Communism not merely as a bad political system, but as a false faith. His break with Communism was accompanied by a turn toward Christianity, and he increasingly described the struggle as one between a world centered upon God and one centered upon man.

Chambers's experience also challenges the claim that Communist infiltration in America was merely Cold War hysteria. He had personally participated in the Communist underground, and later evidence from VENONA and Soviet archives confirmed that Soviet espionage networks in the United States were real. We'll examine that evidence more fully in the next major section.

For now, Chambers gives us the testimony of a man who believed in Communism deeply enough to serve it, saw it from the inside, and eventually concluded that its deepest problem was spiritual as well as political.

d. Xi Van Fleet - Mao's Cultural Revolution

Xi Van Fleet experienced Marxism from another direction. She grew up in China during Mao's Cultural Revolution and, as a teenager, was sent to the countryside for political "reeducation."

She witnessed revolutionary indoctrination, public denunciations, attacks upon traditional beliefs and institutions, and the mobilization of young people around Maoist ideology. She later moved to the United States in 1986. (Xi Van Fleet, *Mao's America: A Survivor's Warning* [Center Street, 2023].)

Her experience is especially useful because the Cultural Revolution wasn't merely an economic program. It attempted to transform how people thought, what they valued, how they understood history, and even how children related to parents, teachers, traditions, and authority.

In her book, *Mao's America*, Van Fleet argues that Americans should recognize similarities between what she experienced during Mao's Cultural Revolution and ideological developments she sees in the United States today.

e. Soon-Ok Lee - A North Korean Prison-Camp Survivor

North Korean defector Soon-Ok Lee provides another disturbing firsthand account of life under Communist rule.

Lee spent more than five years in a North Korean prison camp before eventually escaping the country. In 2002, she testified in the United States about prison conditions she had witnessed, including the brutal treatment of prisoners and Christians. (USCIRF, “North Korean Defector to Testify at Hearing on Religious Freedom in North Korea,” January 22, 2002; U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, “Examining the Plight of Refugees: The Case of North Korea,” June 21, 2002.)

Her testimony described prisoners enduring long hours of forced labor, beatings, torture, hunger, and degrading treatment. U.S. State Department reporting later cited her testimony when discussing North Korean prison conditions and noted that prisoners held for religious reasons were generally treated even more severely than other inmates. (U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, North Korea [2004].)

Lee later published her experiences in *Eyes of the Tailless Animals: Prison Memoirs of a North Korean Woman*. Her testimony is especially valuable because North Korea remains one of the world’s most closed societies, making firsthand accounts from defectors and prison survivors particularly important.

Her story also reinforces the point made in the previous section: Christianity becomes especially threatening to a totalitarian state when believers recognize an authority higher than the government.

f. Why Their Testimony Matters

When their testimony is placed beside Communist writings, government archives, demographic research, prison records, and the historical evidence already considered, a remarkably consistent picture emerges.

Marxism promises liberation, yet people who live under Marxist governments repeatedly describe coercion. It promises equality, yet ruling parties acquired extraordinary power. It promises a new society, yet those who resisted that vision could lose their property, freedom, families, or lives. Where Christianity challenged the supremacy of the Party or state, believers often became particular targets.

Their testimony also teaches something statistics can’t adequately communicate: oppressive systems can look very different from inside the prison cell than they do from a university classroom.

Before comfortable Western Christians dismiss Marxism as an exaggerated danger, they should listen carefully to men and women who actually lived under it. Their testimony brings the issue directly home: What does all of this have to do with America today?

6. CULTURAL MARXISM IS ALIVE AND WELL IN AMERICA

The witnesses we've just considered lived under governments where Marxism had already gained political control.

Though America hasn't yet followed the same path as the Soviet Union, Maoist China, or North Korea, that doesn't mean Marxism has had little influence here.

Soviet intelligence carried out genuine espionage and ideological influence operations inside the United States, while Western Marxist thinkers have developed forms of Marxism that increasingly focus upon culture, psychology, education, law, social institutions, and identity rather than economic class alone.

Over time, these different streams have affected (and continue to affect) American intellectual and cultural life in important ways.

a. What Do We Mean by "Cultural Marxism"?

Cultural Marxism refers to the extension and adaptation of Marxist and Western Marxist ideas beyond economic class and into culture and social institutions.

Classical Marxism focused heavily upon conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Later Western Marxists have increasingly examined the institutions and ideas that shape how people think and live, including family, psychology, education, culture, media, law, sexuality, authority, and other social relationships.

b. Communists and Soviet Espionage in America

Before examining Western Marxist intellectual influence, we should first dispose of one historical myth: actual Communist activity and Soviet espionage in America were not imaginary.

The Communist Party USA maintained real connections with Moscow. After Soviet archives became available following the Cold War, historians Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Soviet archivist Kyrill Anderson documented extensive relationships between the CPUSA and the Soviet Union. Yale University Press describes their archival study as establishing "continuous and intimate ties" between the American Communist Party and Moscow. (Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Kyrill M. Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* [Yale University Press, 1998].)

Whittaker Chambers, whom we've already considered, had personally participated in the Communist underground. His accusations were fiercely disputed at the time, but later evidence confirmed that Soviet espionage networks really did operate inside the United States government and other American institutions.

That evidence becomes especially important when we consider Joseph McCarthy.

c. McCarthy, Salem, and a Real Underlying Threat

Senator Joseph McCarthy became so closely associated with anti-Communism that the term McCarthyism eventually became shorthand for reckless accusation, guilt by association, and abusive investigation.

McCarthy did commit excesses. He made unsupported accusations, treated witnesses irresponsibly, violated Senate norms, and was formally censured by the Senate in 1954. ("The Censure Case of Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin (1954)," [senate.gov](https://www.senate.gov)).

However, just because there were excesses in the hunt for Communists doesn't mean there were no Communists. There plainly were.

People sometimes use the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 in a similar way. Salem has become shorthand for hysteria, false accusation, and unjust prosecution, but whatever judgment one reaches about particular defendants in Salem, abuses committed during those proceedings don't establish that witchcraft itself doesn't exist. Scripture recognizes and condemns occult and sorcery practices (Deut. 18:10–12; Gal. 5:19–21), and people openly identify with and practice forms of witchcraft today.

The point is that misconduct in pursuing a perceived danger doesn't prove that the underlying category of conduct is imaginary.

In the Communist case, however, we have something much stronger than an analogy: later documentary evidence actually confirmed extensive Soviet espionage and Communist penetration.

d. VENONA and Soviet Archival Evidence

Perhaps the strongest documentary evidence came from a highly classified American intelligence effort later known as VENONA.

The U.S. Army's Signal Intelligence Service began the VENONA project in 1943 to analyze Soviet communications. American cryptologists eventually broke portions of Soviet encryption and uncovered messages concerning Soviet espionage operations inside the United States.

Beginning in 1995, the National Security Agency released the VENONA material to the public, eventually declassifying approximately 3,000 translated Soviet messages.

The FBI states that VENONA and related investigations helped identify about 350 people connected with Soviet intelligence. (National Security Agency, "Venona Documents"; Federal Bureau of Investigation, "World War, Cold War, 1939–1953.")

This evidence allowed espionage allegations debated for decades to be compared with Soviet communications themselves.

Historians John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr later examined the material extensively in *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, documenting Americans and U.S. residents who maintained covert relationships with Soviet intelligence. (John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* [Yale University Press, 1999].)

The lesson isn't that every anti-Communist accusation was correct. The lesson is that Communist infiltration was not a fantasy. The Soviet Union recruited Americans, cultivated sources, operated espionage networks, and exploited sympathetic people and organizations inside the United States.

e. Soviet Active Measures

Soviet operations in America extended far beyond stealing military or government secrets. The Soviet Union used what it called “**active measures**”—operations intended to influence the politics, attitudes, public opinion, and social environment of other nations.

In 1981, the U.S. Department of State published *Soviet “Active Measures”: Forgery, Disinformation, Political Operations*. The report documented Soviet use of forged documents, propaganda, false stories, front organizations, political influence operations, and agents of influence to weaken opponents and manipulate public opinion. (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, *Soviet “Active Measures”: Forgery, Disinformation, Political Operations*, Special Report No. 88, October 1981.)

That record matters because it demonstrates that Soviet strategy was never limited to conventional espionage. The Soviet government also attempted to influence what people in other countries believed, how they viewed their own institutions, and how they understood political and social conflicts.

A nation can be attacked by armies, but it can also be weakened through falsehood, propaganda, division, manipulation, and the gradual erosion of confidence in its own institutions.

That brings us to one of the most famous Soviet defectors to warn America about ideological subversion.

f. Yuri Bezmenov - Ideological Subversion

Yuri Bezmenov's warning deserves more attention because he wasn't merely an outside observer of Soviet propaganda. He had participated in it.

Bezmenov worked for the Soviet Novosti Press Agency and later described himself as a Soviet press officer and “P.R.” agent working for the KGB in India.

In 1969, Bezmenov became deputy chief of a Soviet embassy department called the “Research and Counter-Propaganda Group,” where he worked under a KGB officer.

Bezmenov wrote that his group gathered information on people who could shape public opinion—including government officials, journalists, businessmen, writers, university professors, and students—and sought to cultivate people sympathetic to Soviet objectives while discrediting those who resisted them.

His own role, he said, involved befriending and cultivating foreigners, assessing them psychologically, and then passing promising individuals to KGB specialists for further recruitment or manipulation. (Tomas Schuman [Yuri Bezmenov], *Love Letter to America* [1984].)

His operational assignment was primarily in India, not on American university campuses. But what makes his testimony important is that he said the same Soviet system of ideological subversion in which he had participated was deliberately being directed against the United States, with American education as one of its most important targets.

In *Love Letter to America*, Bezmenov specifically described what he called Soviet methods for the “demoralization of American education.”

He listed student and professor exchanges with the Soviet Union, distribution of Marxist and socialist literature on campuses, Soviet participation in academic conferences, ideological influence within schools and universities, Communist and sympathetic student publications, and study groups used to disseminate Soviet propaganda and Communist ideology.

Bezmenov also claimed that radicals within educational institutions could sometimes function knowingly or unknowingly under the influence of Soviet agents. (Tomas Schuman [Yuri Bezmenov], *Love Letter to America* [1984].)

In his famous 1984 interview with G. Edward Griffin, Bezmenov argued that Americans concentrated too much upon Soviet espionage and not enough upon this slower form of ideological warfare.

He estimated that traditional espionage represented only a small portion of Soviet intelligence activity, while the greater effort involved what he called “**ideological subversion,**” “**active measures,**” or **psychological warfare**.

Its purpose, as he described it, was to change how Americans perceived reality until they could no longer recognize or effectively resist threats to their own society.

Bezmenov divided this process into **four stages**.

1) Demoralization. Bezmenov said this stage required approximately fifteen to twenty years because that was roughly the amount of time necessary to educate and shape one generation.

He placed enormous emphasis upon schools and universities because students eventually become professors, journalists, government officials, business leaders, clergy, and other people who shape society.

In his 1984 interview, he specifically claimed that **Marxist-Leninist ideas had been introduced to generations of American students without sufficient opposition from traditional American beliefs and institutions.** Once those students moved into positions of authority, he believed the ideological assumptions learned earlier could reproduce themselves without the Soviets having to direct everything from Moscow.

Demoralization, therefore, meant much more than making people unhappy. Bezmenov used the term to describe a long process of weakening a society's confidence in its moral standards, history, religion, institutions, and basic understanding of itself.

In *Love Letter to America*, he described the targets as including **religion**, education, social life, law enforcement, government, the military, labor relations, and the economy. The purpose was to change the worldview through which people interpreted those institutions.

2) Destabilization. Once those underlying beliefs had been weakened, Bezmenov believed the process could move much more quickly. He estimated two to five years for this stage, during which attention shifted from changing ideas to weakening what he called the “essentials” of a country—its economy, foreign relations, defense, political institutions, and social structure.

The subverter no longer needed to persuade everyone directly because a successfully demoralized society would increasingly destabilize itself through political division, distrust, radicalization, economic conflict, and struggles for power. (Tomas Schuman [Yuri Bezmenov], *Love Letter to America* [1984].)

3) Crisis. Bezmenov described the third stage as much shorter—perhaps two to six months. By this point, the society would be sufficiently divided and unstable that a major political, economic, military, or social crisis could create demands for drastic solutions. People frightened by disorder might accept powerful leaders, emergency authority, or fundamental changes they would previously have resisted. Bezmenov argued that a foreign military invasion might not even be necessary because the weakened country could experience revolutionary political change largely from within.

4) Normalization. The final stage was what Bezmenov called “normalization,” borrowing the term from Soviet descriptions of Czechoslovakia after the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion. Once the new order had been established, revolutionary disorder would no longer be useful.

The government would restore “order,” suppress remaining opposition, and make the new political system permanent. Ironically, Bezmenov warned that radicals and sympathetic activists who had helped destabilize the old system could themselves become targets because a new authoritarian government would no longer need agitators challenging authority. (Tomas Schuman [Yuri Bezmenov], *Love Letter to America* [1984].)

The most important part of Bezmenov's warning was therefore not that Soviet agents would secretly control every American institution. His argument was more disturbing than that. If the first stage succeeded, eventually they wouldn't have to.

People educated in the new ideology would become teachers, professors, journalists, officials, activists, and cultural leaders themselves, passing those assumptions to the next generation.

Bezmenov said by 1984 that much of the process in America was already being carried forward by Americans against Americans rather than by Soviet operatives directly.

Bezmenov's four-stage theory was his own explanation as a Soviet defector, not an official finding of the United States government, and it should be identified as such. But he was describing a form of ideological warfare closely related to the Soviet propaganda and influence operations that U.S. government investigations separately documented.

That makes his warning particularly relevant to this study. A foreign ideology doesn't necessarily have to conquer a country by sending an army across its border. If it can change what generations are taught, how they understand their history, what they believe about morality and religion, and how they interpret their own institutions, eventually much of the work of ideological transformation can be carried out from within.

g. "Useful Idiots" and Unwitting Assistance

That raises another important point. A person doesn't have to be a Soviet spy or card-carrying Communist to advance ideas useful to Marxist objectives.

The phrase "**useful idiot**" has long been associated with Communism, although its popular attribution to Lenin is difficult to verify.

Some people were knowing Soviet agents, while others were committed Communists who understood the movement they supported. Still others were sympathetic fellow travelers who accepted important parts of the ideology, while some sincerely believed they were promoting peace, justice, equality, or social reform without understanding how they were being manipulated or what larger ideological purpose their activity might serve.

Paul Kengor examines this history in *Dupes: How America's Adversaries Have Manipulated Progressives for a Century*, drawing upon FBI records, Soviet archives, and other evidence to argue that Communist governments repeatedly exploited sympathetic Americans who didn't necessarily understand the larger objectives they were helping advance. (Paul Kengor, *Dupes* [ISI Books, 2010].)

The principle remains important because ideological influence doesn't require everyone involved to know its intellectual ancestry. Someone can repeat a Marxist-derived argument without ever having read Marx, just as ideas can continue influencing a culture long after people have forgotten where those ideas originated.

h. The Frankfurt School

Soviet espionage and active measures form only one part of Marxist influence in America. A separate intellectual development occurred through what became known as the Frankfurt School.

The Institute for Social Research was founded in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1923. Its own institutional history describes its early research program as studying the history of Marxism and contemporary political and economic developments “in the spirit of Marxism.”

Under Max Horkheimer, the Institute developed an interdisciplinary program combining Marxist social criticism with philosophy, psychology, political economy, sociology, and cultural analysis—an approach that became known as Frankfurt School Critical Theory. (Institut für Sozialforschung, “History”; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Critical Theory [Frankfurt School].”)

The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* identifies Frankfurt School Critical Theory with the Western European Marxist tradition. These thinkers didn’t merely repeat Marx word for word. They revised and expanded Marxist thought by drawing upon psychology, sociology, philosophy, and other disciplines as they tried to explain why the revolutionary transformation Marxists had expected wasn’t occurring in advanced Western societies. (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Critical Theory [Frankfurt School].”)

That distinction is important. The Frankfurt School was Marxist, but it wasn’t simply Soviet Communism transferred into a university classroom. Some of its thinkers criticized Soviet Marxism themselves. Its importance lies instead in how Western Marxism expanded beyond factories and economic class into culture, psychology, authority, social institutions, and human consciousness.

i. The Frankfurt School Comes to America

The rise of Adolf Hitler forced the Frankfurt School out of Germany. In April 1933, the Nazi government enacted the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, which removed Jews and political opponents from public employment, including positions at state universities.

The Gestapo closed the Frankfurt Institute in July 1933, and its scholars fled Germany. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service”; Institut für Sozialforschung, “History.”)

An important distinction should be maintained. Many Jewish scholars fled Nazi Germany, but that doesn’t mean all Jewish émigré academics were Marxists. Our concern here is specifically with the documented Marxist orientation of the Frankfurt Institute.

In 1934, the Institute for Social Research relocated to New York and was housed at Columbia University, where it remained during its years of exile before returning to Frankfurt after World War II. (Institut für Sozialforschung, “History.”)

This placed a Western Marxist intellectual institution inside one of America's leading universities during an important period of twentieth-century intellectual development.

Its influence did not disappear when the Institute later returned to Germany. Martin Jay's major history of the Frankfurt School describes its importance for twentieth-century sociological, political, and cultural thought, while the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* describes its impact upon American and international social and political theory as enormous. (Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*; *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Herbert Marcuse.")

j. Marxist Analysis Expands Into Culture

The Frankfurt School matters especially because Marxist analysis was no longer focused primarily upon who owned the factories.

Frankfurt theorists increasingly examined psychology, family relationships, authority, education, popular culture, media, prejudice, mass society, social institutions, and the ways people form their beliefs.

Instead of concentrating only upon economic ownership, they asked how culture and institutions might preserve what they considered oppressive relationships and how those structures might be transformed.

The underlying questions remained recognizably Marxist: Who possesses power? How does domination operate? How do prevailing ideas preserve an existing social order? What changes in consciousness and society are necessary for emancipation?

This development provides a crucial bridge between classical economic Marxism and what this study calls cultural Marxism.

Economic class remained important, but the field of struggle had expanded. If culture itself helped preserve an oppressive system, then changing the culture became part of changing society.

k. Herbert Marcuse and the New Left

Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) became especially important in carrying this kind of Western Marxist thought into American cultural and political life.

Marcuse was a prominent Frankfurt School thinker who remained in the United States after many of his colleagues returned to Europe.

By the 1960s, Marcuse had become one of the world's best-known philosophers and social theorists and was closely associated with the student movements and the New Left. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* notes that he was often called the "Guru of the New Left," although Marcuse himself rejected that title. (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Herbert Marcuse.")

Marcuse increasingly looked beyond the traditional industrial working class as the primary source of radical change. His thought identified revolutionary potential among students, outsiders, marginalized groups, and emerging social movements, including feminism. This represented an important development from classical Marxism, which had expected the industrial proletariat to become the revolutionary class.

Marcuse's controversial 1965 essay, "Repressive Tolerance," also illustrates how far his analysis extended into Western cultural and political institutions. He argued that supposedly neutral tolerance could help preserve oppressive systems and proposed what he called "liberating tolerance," including "intolerance against movements from the Right and toleration of movements from the Left." (Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance" [1965].)

The significance of Marcuse's argument is difficult to miss. A major Western Marxist thinker was explicitly applying revolutionary and emancipatory analysis to speech, culture, students, feminism, political movements, and the meaning of tolerance itself within Western democratic society.

l. Critical Legal Studies

Western Marxist influence later appeared within American legal theory through **Critical Legal Studies**, commonly called **CLS**, which emerged during the 1970s and 1980s.

CLS didn't come from Marxism alone. It also drew upon American legal realism, deconstruction, feminism, anti-racism philosophies.

The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* describes CLS as a radical legal movement shaped in part by "the Marxist and realist traditions" and explains that it echoed Marxist arguments about how power and dominant interests can shape law. (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Law and Ideology.")

This represented another extension of Marxist critical analysis.

Instead of treating law simply as neutral principles applied impartially, CLS scholars often examined whether apparently neutral rules could reflect, conceal, or reinforce underlying structures of power.

That movement is particularly important because Critical Race Theory later developed partly through engagement with CLS.

m. Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory, or **CRT**, emerged as a distinct movement within American legal scholarship during the 1980s. Its relationship with Critical Legal Studies isn't merely something asserted by CRT's critics.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, one of CRT's foundational scholars, later described the movement as developing through a "dialectical engagement" with liberal race theory and Critical Legal Studies.

Crenshaw characterized CRT both as an intervention in liberal racial thought and as a race-focused intervention within CLS. (Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, "The First Decade: Critical Reflections," *UCLA Law Review* 49 [2002].)

CRT has its own intellectual history, including American civil-rights law, legal realism, CLS, feminism, and other influences. At the same time, it isn't historically disconnected from Marxist-influenced critical thought.

That intellectual relationship matters because many familiar questions remain: How does power operate? How do institutions preserve inequality? Can apparently neutral rules conceal domination? How should society be transformed to achieve liberation?

We'll test such claims biblically later. For now, the historical point is that CRT developed through an intellectual stream that included Critical Legal Studies, and CLS itself had documented Marxist influences.

n. Identity Politics and Group Conflict

One of the clearest ways modern Marxism has expanded beyond classical Marxism is through identity politics.

Marx divided society mainly between economic classes—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—and interpreted history through conflict between those groups. Modern critical theories broaden that same pattern by dividing people according to race, sex, sexuality, gender, class, and other identities.

Intersectionality adds to this by examining how different identities supposedly combine to increase privilege or oppression.

The result is a way of thinking that increasingly sorts people into competing groups and asks who has power, who is oppressed, who is privileged, and whose power must be reduced.

That kind of thinking naturally produces division. Jesus warned:

(Matt. 12:25 NASB) "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand."

A society constantly taught to see its neighbors primarily as members of competing racial, sexual, economic, or political groups is being trained toward division rather than unity.

Instead of asking, "What did this individual actually do?" people can begin asking, "Which group does he belong to?" Guilt, innocence, privilege, victimhood, and moral standing can then become attached to group identity.

Identity itself can also become an idol. Our race, sex, nationality, social class, political group, or personal identity can become the thing that most defines us and determines how we understand ourselves and everyone else.

But Scripture gives human beings a much deeper identity. Every person is created in the image of God:

(Gen. 1:27 NASB) “God created man in His own image.”

Paul also reminds us that mankind is one human family:

(Acts 17:26 CSB) “From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth.”

Those truths cut directly against a worldview that constantly divides people into competing identity groups. We certainly have different families, nations, cultures, backgrounds, and experiences, but those differences don’t erase our common humanity. Before someone is white or black, rich or poor, male or female, powerful or powerless, he is a human being made in God’s image and descended from the same human family.

That’s why identity politics can become so destructive.

It makes our differences more important than our shared humanity, encourages collective guilt and grievance, and can turn neighbors against one another.

The biblical answer is to judge people truthfully and impartially while remembering that no group possesses a monopoly on either sin or righteousness (Lev. 19:15; Rom. 3:23).

Modern identity politics therefore carries forward Marxism’s old habit of dividing society into opposing groups.

The labels have changed, but the danger remains: a house divided against itself cannot stand.

o. Marxist and Marxist-Derived Theory in Universities and Schools Today

These theories are not confined to old books, obscure academic journals, or a handful of law schools.

Critical Race Theory and related critical frameworks have become established parts of American higher education, appearing in scholarship, law schools, schools of education, teacher-training programs, social sciences, and other academic disciplines.

The breadth of the academic literature itself demonstrates this.

In a 2022 peer-reviewed study, Judith C. P. Lin described a research project that identified **more than 1,000 academic articles involving Critical Race Theory across a wide range of disciplines**. Her review specifically examined CRT applications not merely in law, education, and ethnic studies, but also in health sciences, computer science and information technology, sports, business, and religion. Lin expressly described her purpose as demonstrating the “breadth of the application of CRT.” (Judith C. P. Lin, “Exposing the Chameleon-Like Nature of Racism: A Multidisciplinary Look at Critical Race Theory in Higher Education,” *Higher Education* 85 [2023]: 1085–1100, published online May 27, 2022.)

Nor is that merely an assessment by critics of CRT.

A 2015 ASHE Higher Education Report reviewed twenty years of CRT in higher education as a theoretical framework, analytical tool, and research methodology. In 2024, the authoritative *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* published another major review stating that CRT was “increasing in popularity throughout the academy and beyond” and examining how higher-education scholars use it in both research and practice. (Dorian L. McCoy and Dirk J. Rodricks, *Critical Race Theory in Higher Education: 20 Years of Theoretical and Research Innovations* [2015]; Antar A. Tichavakunda, “Critical Race Theory in Higher Education: Where We Are and Where We Need to Go,” *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, vol. 39 [2024].)

Schools of education are particularly important because they train future teachers.

Frederick M. Hess and Lindsey M. Burke examined publicly available faculty biographies, CVs, and research-interest lists involving 3,190 core faculty members drawn from the twenty highest-ranked education schools and twenty education schools producing the most teachers. They searched for terms including Critical Race Theory, intersectionality, postcolonial theory, QuantCrit, queer theory, and whiteness.

Among the top-ranked education schools, **48 percent** of faculty had a research interest or area of study involving one of the diversity-related categories. Among the largest teacher-producing schools, **40 percent** reported diversity as a research interest. They further found that between one-quarter and one-third of scholars focusing upon race and diversity approached their work as critical theorists. (Frederick M. Hess and Lindsey M. Burke, “Does Race Get Short Shrift in Education Research and Teacher Training?” Heritage Foundation Issue Brief No. 6073 [2021]; Lindsey M. Burke, “The Credential Cartel—How Colleges of Education Spread Critical Race Theory,” in *The Critical Classroom* [Heritage Foundation, 2022].)

Specific universities make the breadth even clearer.

At Duke University School of Law in North Carolina in Spring 2025, “Critical Race Theory” taught interest convergence, social construction of race, intersectionality, whiteness, white privilege, colorblindness, microaggressions, implicit bias, and related concepts. Students were directed to apply those frameworks to voting rights, education, affirmative action, employment, immigration, and criminal disparities. (Duke University School of Law, “Critical Race Theory,” Course 504, Spring 2025.)

At the University of Virginia School of Law in Spring 2025, “Critical Race Theory and Criminal Justice” expressly examined the criminal justice system through CRT, applying the framework to policing, pretrial detention, prosecution, adjudication, and punishment. (University of Virginia School of Law, “Critical Race Theory and Criminal Justice,” LAW 7036, Spring 2025.)

At the University of Texas School of Law in Fall 2025, “Race and the Law” required Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic’s *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* and examined subjects including movement lawyering, prison abolition, racial equality, and social change. (University of Texas School of Law, “Race and the Law,” Fall 2025.)

At the **University of Miami School of Law in Spring 2024**, “Race & Economic Justice” expressly included Critical Race Theory among the theories through which students examined relationships among race, law, and economics. (University of Miami School of Law, “Race & Economic Justice,” Spring 2024.)

At **Tulane University Law School in Louisiana in Spring 2024**, a “Critical Race Theory Seminar” examined race and legal interpretation and how legal rules could inhibit critical approaches to justice for disadvantaged groups. (Tulane University Law School, “Critical Race Theory Seminar,” Spring 2024 Registration Materials.)

But CRT’s academic presence extends far beyond law schools.

At the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Education in the 2026–2027 curriculum**, “Critical Race Theory: History, Research, and Practice” traces CRT from its origins in Critical Legal Studies into education and related frameworks including LatCrit, AsianCrit, QueerCrit, TribalCrit, and Critical Race Feminism. The same curriculum also includes “Critical Social Theory.” (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, EDUC 972 and EDUC 974, 2026–2027.)

At the **University of Georgia in 2026**, the university’s Bulletin lists “Critical Race Theory in Social Studies Education.” The course applies CRT to institutional racism in schools and expressly describes CRT as an analytical and theoretical mechanism for examining social-studies education, curriculum, citizenship, and civics education. (University of Georgia Bulletin, ESOC 5070/7070, “Critical Race Theory in Social Studies Education,” 2026.)

At **Vanderbilt University in Tennessee in the 2023–2024 academic year**, the undergraduate curriculum included “Critical Race Theory: Race, Racism and Narratives in Education,” teaching CRT foundations, methodologies, and policy-analysis methods as tools for examining educational practices and policies. Vanderbilt’s Peabody College likewise listed a graduate course using CRT as an analytical framework for examining inequalities in education. (Vanderbilt University, Undergraduate Catalog, AADS 2308, and Peabody College Catalog, EDUC 7550, 2023–2024.)

At the **Harvard Graduate School of Education**, “Critical Race Theory in Education” teaches CRT as an epistemological, methodological, and pedagogical framework for examining racial disparities in K–12 and higher education. The course expressly begins with CRT’s roots in Critical Legal Studies and trains students to investigate educational questions through a CRT framework. (Harvard Graduate School of Education, T002A, “Critical Race Theory in Education.”)

At **Yale University in Fall 2025**, “Critical Race Theory,” offered through the Yale School of the Environment and cross-listed with law, studied CRT from its origins to its contemporary expression. Yale’s description specifically notes that CRT has had significant influence in social-science disciplines outside law. Yale again lists the course in its **2026–2027 curriculum**. (Yale School of the Environment, ENV 633/law, “Critical Race Theory,” Fall 2025 and 2026–2027.)

At **Teachers College, Columbia University in 2026**, the curriculum lists “Critical Race Theory in Education,” which uses CRT as an analytical framework for studying inequalities in schools and community settings and examines race-based epistemologies, methodologies, and pedagogies. Columbia Law School also offered “Critical Race Methods: Practices, Prisms, and Problems” in **January 2025**, where students studied and applied methods associated with CRT, including intersectionality, social construction, critical storytelling, and racial realism. (Teachers College, Columbia University, C&T 6560, “Critical Race Theory in Education,” 2026; Columbia Law School, “Legal Methods II: Critical Race Methods,” January 2025.)

At **Stanford University in Autumn 2026**, “Critical Race Theory in Education” uses CRT as an analytical framework for studying inequalities throughout P-20 education and examines white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and interlocking inequalities. Stanford also offers “Social Theory & Education,” which includes dialectical materialism, racial capitalism, hegemony, queer theory, gender and social reproduction, and related critical approaches. (Stanford University, EDUC/CSRE 439, “Critical Race Theory in Education,” and EDUC/CSRE 406, “Social Theory & Education,” Autumn 2026.)

These aren’t isolated examples from a fringe corner of academia. The scholarly literature documents CRT across numerous disciplines, broad studies find critical-theory approaches deeply represented within colleges of education, and current university catalogs show CRT being taught at major public and private institutions throughout the country. It has moved well beyond its origins in legal scholarship into education, teacher training, social science, public policy, and other fields.

That matters because universities don’t merely preserve ideas. They develop them, teach them, apply them, and train the people who carry them into schools, government, law, business, churches, media, and other institutions.

The documented spread of CRT and related critical theories therefore reinforces the larger point of this study: Marxist-derived critical analysis didn’t remain confined to twentieth-century intellectual history. Its descendants remain active and influential within American academic life today.

p. Critical Theories in Churches and Seminaries

Critical Race Theory didn’t remain confined to law schools and secular universities.

Seminary students ordinarily arrive after years of undergraduate education, where critical theories have become increasingly established. They then enter theological education and eventually serve as pastors, professors, denominational leaders, and teachers. Ideas that spread through universities can therefore move naturally into seminaries and, from there, into churches.

As we’ve already traced, CRT belongs to the broader Marxist critical-theory family, developing in significant part through Critical Legal Studies and carrying forward categories of power, oppression, dominant and subordinate groups, and social transformation. Those categories eventually entered theological education as well.

Vancouver School of Theology, for example, offered “Critical Theories and the New Testament,” describing Critical Race Theory and intersectionality as “potential lenses” for interpreting New Testament texts and society. The course also included feminist theory, queer theory, and postcolonial approaches and considered how such theories could provide language for social transformation. (Vancouver School of Theology, NT622, “Critical Theories and the New Testament” [2024].)

Boston University School of Theology likewise offered “Introduction to Black Church Studies,” stating: “Using critical race theory, we will explore counter-narratives” concerning Black church origins, theology, liberation, and public life. (Boston University School of Theology, STH TR 820, “Introduction to Black Church Studies” [Fall 2025].)

The controversy also reached Southern Baptist theological education. On November 30, 2020, the presidents of all six Southern Baptist seminaries condemned racism “in any form” while declaring that “affirmation of Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and any version of Critical Theory is incompatible with the Baptist Faith & Message.” Southern Seminary president R. Albert Mohler added that advocating CRT or intersectionality “has no rightful place within an SBC seminary.” (Baptist Press, “Seminary Presidents Reaffirm BFM, Declare CRT Incompatible,” November 30, 2020.)

The pathway is therefore understandable: Marxist-derived critical theories gain influence in universities, university graduates carry those ideas into seminaries, and seminary graduates carry them into churches and Christian institutions.

Christians should therefore examine the worldview assumptions behind these frameworks rather than treating them as neutral tools.

If a framework teaches us to interpret people primarily through power, oppression, group identity, privilege, and competing social groups, we must ask whether those categories come from Scripture or from another worldview.

q. Modern Warnings About America

Several modern writers and survivors warn that Americans shouldn’t assume totalitarian ideas become dangerous only after secret police begin making arrests.

Rod Dreher develops that argument in *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*. Drawing upon interviews with Christians who survived Communist governments in the Soviet bloc, Dreher warns about what he calls “soft totalitarianism,” in which ideological conformity can initially be enforced through social pressure, institutions, employment consequences, technology, cultural expectations, and fear of exclusion rather than through Gulags. (Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies* [Sentinel, 2020].)

Dreher’s central lesson closely follows Solzhenitsyn: Christians must refuse to cooperate with lies, preserve historical memory, strengthen their families and churches, build communities capable of supporting faithful believers, and be prepared to endure social or economic costs rather than surrender the truth.

Xi Van Fleet issues a related warning from her personal experience of Mao's Cultural Revolution. In *Mao's America: A Survivor's Warning*, she argues that Americans should recognize patterns she remembers from China, including revolutionary language, ideological division, attacks upon inherited standards, political indoctrination, public denunciation, and the mobilization of young people around radical social transformation. (Xi Van Fleet, *Mao's America* [Center Street, 2023].)

Paul Kengor's *Dupes* approaches the problem from the history of Communist influence and Soviet manipulation, using FBI records, Soviet archives, and other evidence to examine how Americans sometimes knowingly or unknowingly advanced objectives useful to hostile Communist governments. (Paul Kengor, *Dupes* [ISI Books, 2010].)

The warning they share deserves serious consideration: freedom doesn't have to disappear through one sudden military coup. It can also be weakened gradually as ideas change, institutions adapt, people become afraid to challenge prevailing assumptions, and the surrounding culture becomes increasingly hostile to dissent.

r. The Frog in the Pot - How Gradual Change Becomes Normal

A familiar illustration is the frog in a pot of water that is gradually heated, and by the time the frog realizes the water is boiling, he's already dead.

The point of the illustration is **incrementalism**: when each individual change appears small, people can adjust to one change after another until conditions that once would have alarmed them begin to seem ordinary.

That picture helps explain how ideological change can become normalized. Yesterday's radical idea can become today's controversy and tomorrow's unquestioned assumption because, once one boundary moves, the next change doesn't appear as dramatic. People begin comparing each development with the new normal rather than remembering where they began.

Bezmenov's concept of demoralization described a similar process operating across generations. If education, culture, media, morality, family life, and other institutions gradually train people to understand the world through different assumptions, eventually those assumptions can reproduce themselves without any foreign government giving direct orders.

Paradoxically, this means that ideological influence may become harder to recognize as it becomes more widespread. People grow accustomed to it, words acquire new meanings, new moral assumptions become ordinary, and institutions begin teaching ideas that previous generations would have considered radical. At that point, the person objecting to the change can be portrayed as the extremist because everyone else has already adjusted.

None of this means every cultural change is Marxist. It means Christians must examine the worldview beneath cultural change rather than asking only whether each individual step seems small or harmless.

The army at Helm's Deep didn't appear overnight, and neither did Marxist influence in America.

Marxism didn't disappear when the Soviet flag came down. Soviet espionage and influence operations are matters of documented history, while Western Marxist Critical Theory developed through the Frankfurt School, entered American intellectual life, influenced later critical movements, and helped produce ideas still being taught and applied in universities, schools, law, culture, and even theological education.

Its political, intellectual, cultural, educational, and institutional influence remains alive and powerful in America today.

We now have the basic facts necessary to move from history to the I.R.A.C.P. biblical discernment method.

7. APPLYING I.R.A.C.P. TO MARXISM

We've now examined what Marx and Engels taught, what happened when Marxist movements gained political power, how Communist governments treated Christianity, what survivors experienced, and how Marxist and Marxist-derived ideas entered American intellectual and cultural life. We're finally in a position to take the evidence we have gathered and apply the I.R.A.C.P. method.

I — ISSUE: WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

The issue is simply whether Marxism is compatible with Christianity.

R — RULE: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

a. God Is Creator and Lord

The Bible begins where Marxism does not:

(Gen. 1:1 NASB) "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

God existed before mankind, created everything that exists, and therefore possesses ultimate authority over His creation.

Marx wrote that "Man makes religion, religion does not make man." Scripture teaches exactly the opposite: God made man.

Since God is Creator and Lord, then truth, morality, justice, human dignity, government, property, sexuality, family, and society must ultimately be understood according to His revelation rather than changing human theories.

b. Every Human Being Is Made in God's Image

Scripture teaches:

(Gen. 1:27 NASB) "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

(Acts 17:26a CSB) "From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth..."

Human dignity therefore doesn't come from economic class, race, sex, political usefulness, or membership in an oppressed group. Every human being possesses dignity because every human being bears God's image and belongs to the same human family.

That truth gives Christians a basis for condemning racism, exploitation, oppression, and abuse while preventing us from reducing people to competing social groups. Rich or poor, employer or employee, powerful or powerless, every person possesses the same fundamental dignity before God.

c. Sin Is Universal

Marxism locates mankind's fundamental problem primarily in material conditions, oppressive structures, and conflicts between groups.

Scripture recognizes that sinful people can create unjust systems, but it locates the problem deeper:

(Rom. 3:23 NASB) "[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Scripture condemns unjust laws and exploitation (Isa. 10:1–2; James 5:1–6), so Christians have no excuse for ignoring institutional injustice.

The root problem is the sinful human heart, and that problem exists in every group. Rich and poor, employers and workers, rulers and revolutionaries are all sinners. Changing who holds political or economic power doesn't remove sin from mankind.

d. Salvation Is Found Only in Jesus Christ

Because mankind's deepest problem is sin, our deepest need cannot be satisfied by revolution, redistribution, political reeducation, or social reconstruction. We need reconciliation with God.

(John 14:6 CSB) "Jesus told him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

(Acts 4:12 NASB) "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Christians should seek justice, defend the vulnerable, care for the poor, and oppose evil, but none of those things is the gospel. Jesus Christ died for sinners, rose from the dead, and saves those who repent and believe in Him.

Political reform can restrain evil and improve society. Only Christ can save.

e. Biblical Justice Is Impartial

God commands:

(Lev. 19:15 NASB) “You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.”

Biblical justice refuses partiality in either direction. We may favor neither the powerful nor the disadvantaged merely because of their social position.

Judgment must rest upon truth and conduct.

Scripture also teaches individual responsibility:

(Ezek. 18:20 NASB) “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity.”

Biblical justice therefore defends victims, punishes actual wrongdoing, corrects unjust laws, and requires restitution where appropriate, but it doesn’t assign personal guilt merely because of race, class, ancestry, sex, or group identity.

f. Scripture Recognizes Property, Work, Responsibility, and Generosity

The Bible doesn’t teach Marxist economics, but neither does it defend greed or exploitation. It joins legitimate property with honest work, responsibility, generosity, and care for those in need.

“You shall not steal” assumes legitimate ownership (Ex. 20:15), while the command against coveting refers to property belonging to “your neighbor” (Ex. 20:17). At the same time, employers must pay what they owe (James 5:4), the wealthy must be generous (1 Tim. 6:17–19), and Christians should work so they can help others:

(Eph. 4:28 NASB) “[H]e must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.”

The generosity in Acts wasn’t government confiscation. Christians voluntarily shared what they owned, and Peter specifically told Ananias that his property remained his own before he sold it (Acts 5:4).

g. Government Is Under God

Romans 13 teaches that civil government possesses legitimate authority, but that authority comes from God and remains subordinate to Him. Government restrains evil and promotes justice, but the state doesn't create morality, define truth, or possess unlimited authority over human life.

When government commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands, Christians must say:

(Acts 5:29 NASB) "We must obey God rather than men."

That principle contradicts every totalitarian system that places the Party, state, revolution, or ideology above God. Government is God's servant, not God Himself.

h. Christians Must Expose Falsehood and Answer Arguments

Scripture doesn't tell Christians simply to avoid falsehood. Paul commands:

(Eph. 5:11 NASB) "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them."

Paul likewise writes:

(2 Cor. 10:5 NASB) "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

Christians should therefore expose and oppose Marxism because its claims about God, mankind, sin, justice, salvation, and society conflict with God's Word.

A — ANALYSIS: HOW DOES SCRIPTURE APPLY?

When these biblical Rules are compared with Marxism, the reason this study calls Marxism "the Devil's counterfeit" becomes clear.

a. A False Ultimate Authority

Christianity begins with God, while Marxism rejects divine revelation and replaces it with a human framework for interpreting reality. Once God is removed, mankind must supply its own explanation of history, morality, justice, oppression, and human flourishing.

Classical Marxism made material conditions and class struggle central to understanding society, dividing it principally between the bourgeoisie and proletariat and looking toward revolutionary transformation as the path to liberation. When Marxists gained political power, Communist parties claimed authority to decide which beliefs, institutions, classes, and people served or opposed the revolution.

Modern Marxism has broadened the categories without abandoning the basic method. Western Marxism and later critical theories expanded conflict beyond economic class into culture, race, sex, sexuality, gender, education, law, family, religion, and other institutions.

Dominant and oppressed identities increasingly replace bourgeoisie and proletariat, while power, privilege, systemic oppression, marginalization, and liberation become controlling categories.

This carries forward a fundamental Marxist habit of thought: interpreting society through group conflict, locating injustice primarily in structures of power, and seeking liberation through transforming or dismantling those structures.

That is why Critical Theory becomes especially dangerous when Christians adopt it as an “analytical tool.” A lens affects how we interpret what we see. If Marxist-derived categories frame how Christians understand Scripture, church, family, race, sex, or society, another worldview has already been permitted to frame the question.

Christians should recognize genuine oppression, racism, exploitation, and injustice, but God’s Word must define those things.

We don’t use Marxist categories to interpret Scripture; we use Scripture to judge Marxist categories.

b. A False Understanding of Mankind and Sin

Marxism correctly recognizes that people exploit and oppress one another, but it locates the deepest problem primarily in social structures and conflicts between groups rather than the fallen human heart.

Later critical theories broaden those categories through race, sex, sexuality, and other identities. The danger becomes especially serious when guilt and innocence begin to attach to group position.

Scripture gives a better diagnosis.

Sin can certainly become embedded in laws and institutions because sinful people create them, but no group possesses a monopoly on sin or righteousness. A powerful person can act justly, and an oppressed person can act wickedly. God commands us to defend genuine victims without declaring every member of a supposedly dominant group guilty.

Every group stands under the same verdict: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23 NASB).

c. A False Salvation

Marxism offers a counterfeit salvation by seeking liberation through social transformation rather than reconciliation with God.

Classical Marxism sought the overthrow of existing economic relationships, while Communist governments pursued the new society through revolution, collectivization, political control, and ideological education.

Later Marxist-derived theories often seek liberation by dismantling oppressive structures, redistributing power, changing consciousness, and reconstructing institutions.

Some institutions need reform, but no amount of social reconstruction can make sinners righteous:

(2 Cor. 5:17 NASB) “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature.”

Political reform can restrain evil and improve life. Only Jesus Christ can save and transform the sinner.

d. A False Justice

Christians rightly care about suffering and oppression. Scripture itself commands us to defend the vulnerable, oppose partiality, and condemn injustice.

The disagreement is over how justice is defined. Biblical justice begins with God, while Marxist-derived systems tend to interpret justice through power, oppression, class, and group identity. When those categories control, individual responsibility can be overshadowed by assumptions about which groups are dominant and oppressed.

Scripture commands, “You shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great” (Lev. 19:15 NASB). Biblical justice asks what actually happened, who actually did wrong, who was harmed, and what God’s standard requires.

Marxism therefore counterfeits justice when it begins with genuine concerns about oppression but replaces God’s impartial standard with group conflict.

e. A False Gospel

A counterfeit is most dangerous when it resembles the genuine article.

Christianity and Marxism both speak about oppression, guilt, liberation, transformation, and hope, but they mean radically different things. Christianity teaches that mankind’s deepest bondage is sin, our guilt is before God, our Liberator is Jesus Christ, reconciliation comes through His cross, and our final hope is God’s kingdom.

Marxism offers another explanation of bondage and guilt, another path to liberation, and another vision of transformation. By offering liberation without Christ and transformation without reconciliation to God, it becomes a counterfeit gospel that cannot save.

f. A False Unity

Classical Marxism interprets history through class struggle, while modern Marxist-derived theories extend that conflict into additional dominant and oppressed groups.

Christianity recognizes real conflicts but refuses to make them the foundation of human identity. Christ reconciles people divided by ethnicity, class, nationality, and social position:

(Gal. 3:28 NASB) “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Those distinctions still exist, but they don’t determine our standing before God. Marxism seeks solidarity by organizing groups against a common oppressor. Christianity creates unity through a common Savior.

C — CONCLUSION: WHAT SHOULD WE CONCLUDE?

After examining Marxism’s writings, historical fruit, persecution of Christianity, survivor testimony, influence in America, and worldview claims, this study concludes that **Marxism is fundamentally incompatible with biblical Christianity**.

The disagreement reaches far beyond economics or government programs.

Marxism conflicts with Christianity concerning God, mankind, sin, salvation, authority, justice, property, government, reconciliation, and ultimate hope. It begins without the Creator, misunderstands the deepest cause of evil, seeks liberation through human transformation rather than reconciliation with God, and interprets society through group conflict rather than individual responsibility, impartial justice, and reconciliation in Christ.

Its historical fruit makes the danger even more serious.

Marxist governments have repeatedly concentrated political power, suppressed opposition, confiscated property, attacked religious liberty, imprisoned dissenters, and produced enormous suffering.

Western Marxism has extended categories of conflict, domination, oppression, consciousness, and liberation into culture, education, law, race, identity, and other institutions.

For those reasons, this study concludes that Marxism is the most serious ideological threat facing America today and the greatest counterfeit-Christian scheme presently confronting American culture.

Its danger lies both in its historical record and in its ability to imitate genuine Christian concerns while supplying answers that contradict God’s Word.

P — POLICY: WHY IS GOD’S WAY GOOD?

Christianity doesn’t merely tell us what to reject. It gives us a better understanding of human dignity, justice, responsibility, government, reconciliation, and hope.

God grounds human dignity in His image rather than class or identity. He holds individuals morally responsible rather than judging them merely by their group.

Scripture protects legitimate property while condemning theft, exploitation, greed, and dishonest wages. It honors work while commanding generosity, and it gives government legitimate authority while keeping that authority beneath God.

Biblical justice is impartial. Neither wealth nor poverty, privilege nor disadvantage, majority nor minority status determines guilt or innocence. God protects the weak without making weakness a license for wrongdoing and restrains the powerful without assuming power itself makes someone wicked.

Most importantly, Christianity addresses what Marxism cannot solve: the sinful human heart.

God doesn’t promise salvation through revolution, political power, social engineering, or reconstructed institutions. He offers reconciliation through Jesus Christ and then commands redeemed people to live justly, work honestly, give generously, defend the vulnerable, and oppose evil.

Christians therefore don’t need Marxism to care about justice.

We have God’s Word to define justice, the gospel to address mankind’s deepest problem, and Jesus Christ to provide the liberation, reconciliation, unity, and hope that Marxism can only counterfeit.

8. ANSWERING COMMON OBJECTIONS ABOUT MARXISM

a. "That Wasn't Real Marxism"

Perhaps the most familiar objection is that Stalin, Mao, Castro, the Khmer Rouge, and other Communist governments didn't represent "real Marxism," but merely corrupted an otherwise noble theory of equality and liberation.

There are genuine differences among Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and later Communist governments. Yet the objection becomes difficult to sustain when similar results repeatedly appear under movements that openly identify with the Marxist tradition.

Marx and Engels themselves called for class struggle, the overthrow of bourgeois supremacy, the seizure of political power by the proletariat, extensive economic centralization, and the "forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions."

Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and others didn't invent Marxism's revolutionary character; they developed ideas already present within it.

If one Marxist country became a dictatorship, perhaps a bad ruler could explain it. But when Marxist governments in different nations repeatedly produce concentrated Party power, confiscation, censorship, imprisonment, political repression, and religious persecution, the pattern itself becomes evidence.

The claim that every failed Marxist experiment wasn't "real Marxism" can eventually make the theory impossible to test. If successes count as Marxism but catastrophes never do, Marxism can never be judged by its results.

Jesus gives us a better principle: "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16 NASB).

b. "Cultural Marxism Is Just a Conspiracy Theory"

Another objection is that "cultural Marxism" is nothing more than a conspiracy theory alleging that a secret group of Marxists coordinated the destruction of Western civilization. That isn't the argument of this study.

We have already defined cultural Marxism carefully as the extension and adaptation of Marxist and Western Marxist categories beyond economic class into culture and social institutions.

No secret centralized conspiracy is necessary for that development, because the intellectual history itself is documented. The Frankfurt Institute openly described its early work as conducted "in the spirit of Marxism." Frankfurt School Critical Theory belongs to the Western Marxist tradition. Herbert Marcuse applied critical analysis to culture, students, social movements, sexuality, and political tolerance.

Critical Legal Studies later incorporated Marxist influences into its analysis of law and power, while Critical Race Theory developed partly through engagement with Critical Legal Studies. Kimberlé Crenshaw herself described that relationship as a “dialectical engagement.”

Those are not secret connections invented by critics. They appear in the writings and institutional histories of the thinkers and movements themselves.

Calling every cultural development “Marxist” would be careless, but denying any meaningful connection between Marxism, Western Marxism, Critical Theory, CLS, CRT, and later critical movements requires ignoring a documented intellectual genealogy.

Ideas don’t have to remain unchanged in order to belong to the same intellectual family.

c. “Critical Race Theory Isn’t Marxism”

A related objection says CRT cannot be Marxist because Marx focused upon economic class while CRT focuses primarily upon race.

CRT developed through several influences, including civil-rights scholarship, legal realism, feminism, Critical Legal Studies (CLS), and critical theory. CLS itself had Marxist influences, and foundational CRT scholars identify CLS as one of the movements out of which CRT developed.

The strongest continuity lies in the method of analysis. Classical Marxism interpreted society through class conflict, domination, oppression, and liberation. Later critical theories expanded those categories to race, sex, sexuality, gender, and other identities, while continuing to analyze society through dominant and subordinate groups, structures of power, and social transformation.

This doesn’t mean Marx and modern CRT scholars believe exactly the same things. But children don’t have to be identical to their parents to belong to the same intellectual family.

d. “The Early Church Practiced Communism in Acts 2 and 4”

Some argue that the early church practiced a form of Communism because believers in Acts sold property and shared their possessions with those in need.

The resemblance disappears once we read the passages carefully.

Acts describes voluntary Christian generosity motivated by love, **not government confiscation enforced through political power.**

Believers sold possessions and distributed the proceeds according to need, but private ownership wasn’t abolished.

Peter makes that explicit when confronting Ananias:

(Acts 5:4 NASB) “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?”

Those words make little sense if the apostles had abolished private property. Ananias’s sin wasn’t refusing to surrender his property to the collective; it was lying to God about what he had voluntarily chosen to give.

There is also a fundamental difference in purpose.

Marxist collectivization seeks social transformation through economic and political power, while Acts describes believers whose hearts had already been transformed by Christ freely using their property to care for one another.

One takes because the state claims authority over property. The other gives because love makes a Christian generous.

Acts 2 and 4 therefore provide a powerful example of Christian generosity, not Marxist Communism.

e. “Marxism Is an Obsolete Nineteenth-Century Theory”

Marx wrote in the nineteenth century, but the age of an idea tells us nothing about whether it still influences people.

Christianity is much older than Marxism, yet no one concludes that Christianity therefore has no influence upon the modern world.

More importantly, Marxism never remained frozen in 1848. Lenin adapted it to revolutionary Russia, Mao adapted it to China, and Western Marxists deliberately reconsidered Marxism in light of conditions in modern Western societies.

Frankfurt School thinkers expanded their analysis into psychology, culture, education, family, media, and authority. Marcuse influenced the New Left, Critical Legal Studies later entered American law schools, and CRT subsequently developed partly through CLS.

The Communist Party of China also continues openly to identify Marxism-Leninism as one of its guiding ideologies in 2026.

The question therefore isn’t whether nineteenth-century Marxism remains unchanged. It plainly doesn’t. The question is whether Marxism developed, adapted, and continued influencing governments and intellectual movements.

The evidence considered in this study shows that it did.

f. “Modern Marxists Don’t Want Gulags or Violent Revolution”

Many people influenced by Marxist or critical theories today don’t advocate violent revolution, dictatorship, religious persecution, or Communist collectivization. Some strongly oppose those things.

But an ideology can influence people who reject some of its earlier conclusions. Western Marxists themselves adapted classical Marxism to different circumstances, shifting greater attention toward culture, identity, power, and liberation.

The question, then, isn’t whether a modern activist wants to recreate Stalin’s Soviet Union, but whether he or she has adopted Marxist-derived assumptions about oppression, group conflict, power, morality, or social transformation.

Someone doesn’t have to want a Gulag to accept a false worldview. Good intentions and compassionate language don’t make the underlying ideas true. Christians must test the ideas themselves.

g. “Jesus Was a Socialist”

Some argue that Jesus was a socialist because He cared for the poor, warned about greed, and commanded His followers to be generous. But caring for the poor isn’t socialism. God commanded generosity and justice centuries before modern socialism existed (Deut. 15:7–11; Prov. 14:31).

Jesus certainly condemned greed and commanded His followers to help people in need (Luke 12:15, 33). But He never taught class warfare, abolition of private property, government ownership of the means of production, or forced redistribution of wealth. His commands were directed toward individuals who were responsible before God for how they used what they possessed.

When a man asked Jesus to intervene in an inheritance dispute, Jesus refused to become the distributor of the property and instead warned, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed” (Luke 12:13–15 NASB). Jesus addressed the sinful heart rather than calling for the government to seize and redistribute the inheritance.

Jesus taught radical generosity, but generosity and socialism aren’t the same thing.

Biblical generosity says, “What God has entrusted to me should be used faithfully to help others.” Marxist socialism places economic resources under collective or state control and seeks redistribution through political force.

Jesus wasn’t a socialist. He commanded people to love their neighbors, reject greed, work honestly, give generously, and use their possessions as faithful stewards before God. Christianity changes the heart and produces willing generosity; it doesn’t require Marxist economics to care for the poor.

9. CONCLUSIONS ABOUT MARXISM

After examining Marxism's history, persecution of Christianity, influence in America, and conflict with Scripture, several conclusions are clear.

1. Marxism Is a Counterfeit Christianity

Marxism explains mankind through oppression and group conflict and seeks liberation through social transformation inside a worldview that rejects God. Christianity teaches that mankind's deepest problem is sin and that true liberation is salvation found only through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as God and Savior.

2. The Historical Fruit Confirms the Danger of Marxism

When Marxist movements gain power, similar patterns repeatedly appear: concentrated Party control, confiscation, censorship, imprisonment, forced labor, religious persecution, famine, and suppression of opposition. Millions upon millions have died under Marxist governments, while countless others endured imprisonment, torture, exile, and persecution. Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16 NASB). Those fruits cannot simply be dismissed as accidents.

3. Marxism's Persecution of Christianity Reflects a Deeper Conflict

Christians affirm, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29 NASB). Communist governments therefore repeatedly seek to destroy Christianity or bring churches under state control. Christianity says Jesus is Lord. Totalitarian Marxism cannot tolerate another Lord.

4. Marxism Is the Most Serious Ideological Threat Facing America Today

Marxism didn't disappear with the Soviet Union. Western Marxism continues to develop through Critical Theory, the Frankfurt School, the New Left, Critical Legal Studies, Critical Race Theory, intersectionality, and related movements. These ideas continue to heavily influence education, law, culture, and Christian institutions in America and throughout the world.

5. Christians Must Expose Marxism Biblically

Christians should understand Marxism, recognize its later forms, expose its falsehoods, and refuse to adopt Marxist categories merely because they are presented as tools for justice or compassion (Eph. 5:11; 2 Cor. 10:5). Most importantly, the gospel must remain central. Political victory cannot regenerate a sinner, and defeating Marxism cannot save a soul.

R. G. Lee warned that "the Devil pays only in counterfeit money." Marxism offers counterfeit justice, liberation, unity, and hope.

The counterfeit cannot save. Only Jesus Christ can.

B. CHRISTIANITY, AMERICA, AND “CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM”

Was America founded within a Christian framework? Is America a covenant nation like Old Testament Israel? Should Christians influence government according to biblical convictions? Does religious liberty require Christianity to stay out of public life?

Those are different questions, and they require different answers.

At its most extreme, “Christian nationalism” can describe ideas Christians should reject. America hasn’t replaced Israel. The United States isn’t the Church. Government shouldn’t try to make anyone become a Christian, and non-Christians deserve the same basic justice because every person is made in God’s image.

But the same label is also applied to much more ordinary beliefs: that America arose within an overwhelmingly Christian civilization, that Christianity deeply influenced its laws and institutions, and that Christians have the same right as everyone else to vote, seek office, advocate for laws, and bring their convictions into public life.

The problem is that “Christian nationalism” has no single accepted meaning.

As a result, two people can argue about “Christian nationalism” while talking about very different things. It is like two people arguing about “Larry” when one means Larry Jones and the other means Larry Williams.

That ambiguity can also produce a **straw man**.

Someone may legitimately believe that America was historically shaped by Christianity, that biblical morality belongs in public discussion, and that Christians should participate politically according to their convictions. None of those beliefs necessarily means that America is Israel, that government should force Christianity upon unbelievers, or that non-Christians should be denied equal justice.

Biblical discernment therefore requires us to look beyond the label. We need to define the Issue, examine the actual history, distinguish legitimate Christian influence from genuinely unbiblical ideas, and then determine what Scripture says Christians should do as citizens of a constitutional republic.

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CALL AMERICA A “CHRISTIAN NATION”?

The phrase “Christian nation” must be defined before it can be affirmed or rejected.

a. America Is Not Covenant Israel

Calling America historically Christian doesn’t mean that the United States possesses the covenant status of ancient Israel.

Israel was uniquely chosen by God, brought into covenant through direct revelation, given divinely revealed laws, and assigned a special role in redemptive history. America received no such covenant, inspired constitution, promised land, or divinely appointed place in the unfolding of salvation.

Under the New Covenant, the Church is God’s “holy nation,” consisting of people redeemed by Christ from **every** tribe, language, people, and nation (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 5:9–10). No modern political nation, including the United States, can claim that identity.

b. “Christian Nation” Doesn’t Mean Every American Was a Christian

Calling America historically Christian also doesn’t mean that every colonist, Founder, president, or citizen was genuinely converted. Historical records can establish religious beliefs, affiliations, institutions, and practices, but they can’t prove regeneration.

The relevant historical question is whether Christianity was sufficiently dominant in the population, institutions, law, education, morality, and public life from which America developed that Christianity can properly be called a major foundation of the nation.

c. America’s Sins Don’t Erase Its Christian Foundations

Calling America historically Christian also doesn’t mean America was sinless. Slavery, mistreatment of Native Americans, political corruption, sexual immorality, and many other sins form part of American history and shouldn’t be hidden or excused.

But national sin doesn’t prove the absence of Christian foundations. People frequently violate the moral standards they profess. Hypocrisy shows failure to live according to a standard; it doesn’t prove the standard never existed.

Scripture says:

(Prov. 14:34 NASB) “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.”

America isn’t Israel, but neither is America morally independent of God. “Any people” remain accountable to the Creator.

d. We Are Making a Historical and Civilizational Claim

When this study describes America as historically Christian, therefore, it is making primarily a historical and civilizational claim rather than a covenantal or ecclesiastical one.

America didn't arise from an Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, atheistic, or religiously indifferent civilization. It emerged from British colonies in which Christianity—overwhelmingly Protestant Christianity—occupied an extraordinary institutional, cultural, educational, and moral position.

The historical evidence overwhelmingly supports that conclusion.

2. THE CHRISTIAN FOUNDATIONS OF COLONIAL AMERICA

America's Christian foundations didn't suddenly appear when the Declaration of Independence was signed. They had been developing in what is now the United States for more than a century through colonial government, law, education, worship, and daily life.

a. The Colonies Were Different but Overwhelmingly Christian

The colonies weren't identical. They were established at different times, for different purposes, and by people from different Christian traditions. Anglicans, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers, Catholics, and others frequently disagreed.

Some colonies were established primarily for commercial purposes, while others were founded expressly to build religious communities or provide refuge from persecution.

Nevertheless, Christianity was deeply embedded in colonial life. The Library of Congress describes New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland as colonies conceived substantially as "plantations of religion" and notes that even commercially oriented Virginia was led by people strongly committed to Protestant Christianity. (Library of Congress, Religion and the Founding of the American Republic, "America as a Religious Refuge.")

Even Jamestown began public Christian worship almost immediately. The National Park Service records that the Rev. Robert Hunt led public thanksgiving and prayer at Cape Henry on April 29, 1607, and that the settlers at Jamestown regularly attended prayer and worship. (National Park Service, "The Reverend Robert Hunt: The First Chaplain at Jamestown.")

b. Christianity Appeared Openly in Colonial Law and Government

Colonial governing documents contained unmistakably Christian language.

Rhode Island's 1663 Royal Charter described the colonists as seeking to edify one another in the "holy Christian faith and worship" while also granting unusually broad liberty of conscience. Religious liberty and an expressly Christian public framework existed together. (Rhode Island State Archives, Rhode Island Royal Charter, 1663.)

William Penn's 1701 Charter of Privileges protected people who acknowledged Almighty God as Creator and Ruler from religious coercion while providing that those professing faith in "Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the World" could hold legislative and executive office. (Yale Law School, Avalon Project, Charter of Privileges Granted by William Penn, October 28, 1701.)

Georgia's 1777 Constitution likewise required representatives to be Protestant while separately protecting the free exercise of religion. (Georgia Constitution of 1777, arts. VI, LVI, Yale Law School, Avalon Project.)

These weren't merely comments from private letters revealing what a few individuals personally believed. They were public legal documents governing society.

c. Religious Establishment and Religious Liberty Existed Side by Side

Congress's Constitution Annotated explains that every colonial government possessed at least some elements of religious establishment.

Virginia officially established the Church of England, Puritan New England governments supported Congregational churches, public funds supported ministers in various places, and religious qualifications sometimes affected civil participation. (Constitution Annotated, "State-Established Religion in the Colonies.")

Christians need not defend every one of those practices. Some establishments coerced religious observance, burdened dissenters—including Baptists—or denied equal civil participation because of religious belief. Government can't produce regeneration through taxes, fines, religious tests, or compulsory worship.

But those abuses don't prove colonial America was secular. They demonstrate the opposite historical point: Americans were arguing about which Christian denominations government should support, how dissenters should be treated, and where the proper boundary between church and state should lie. Those were disputes within a deeply Christian culture.

d. Christianity Was Deeply Embedded in Colonial Education

The same pattern appears in higher education.

Harvard was established in Puritan Massachusetts, and Harvard Divinity School's own history records the founders' concern that churches not be left with an "illiterate ministry." (Harvard Divinity School, "History and Mission").

Yale traces its origin to colonial clergymen and a purpose of educating young men for service in "Church and Civil State." (Yale University, "Traditions & History.")

Princeton's founders were Presbyterian ministers, while William & Mary's charter expressly included educating ministers and propagating the Christian faith (Princeton University, "Role of Religion"; College of William & Mary, "Royal Charter.")

Rutgers arose from Dutch Reformed efforts to educate ministers, while Dartmouth's charter expressly referred to spreading Christian knowledge. Brown originated through Baptist initiative while strongly protecting liberty of conscience.

The University of Pennsylvania and King's College, now Columbia, require more qualification because neither was simply a ministerial school. Yet both developed within a heavily Christian environment and had strong connections with Christian clergy and institutions.

Christianity therefore played an extraordinary role in the development of colonial higher education even though the colleges differed in denominational control and religious openness.

e. Christianity Also Shaped Ordinary Literacy

Christian influence wasn't limited to colleges.

The Smithsonian describes the *New England Primer* as one of the most successful colonial textbooks. It incorporated material from the King James Bible, prayers, catechism, and Christian moral instruction, reflecting the belief that literacy enabled people to read Scripture for themselves. (Smithsonian National Museum of American History, "The New-England Primer.")

This reflected the biblical duty to teach God's truth to the next generation:

(Deut. 6:6–7 CSB) "These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

Colonial education ordinarily didn't treat knowledge, morality, and religion as completely separate categories.

f. What Does the Colonial Evidence Show?

The Library of Congress estimates that 75 to 80 percent of the colonial population attended churches between 1700 and 1740, describes American Deists as no more than "a minority within a minority," and reports that Jews constituted about one-tenth of one percent of the colonial population in 1776. (Library of Congress, Religion in Eighteenth-Century America; "Jewish Life in 1776.")

None of that diminishes the dignity or contributions of religious minorities. It simply establishes the historical proportions of the society.

If another civilization had religious charters, publicly supported clergy, religious qualifications for office, widespread worship, colleges founded by ministers and churches, children learning from textbooks based upon its sacred writings, and public debates framed by its theology, historians would naturally recognize that religion as a major foundation of the society.

The same historical standard should be applied to Christianity in colonial America.

Colonial America wasn't a secular civilization populated incidentally by private Christians.

Colonial America was a deeply Christian and predominantly Protestant society containing numerous denominations, genuine religious minorities, serious moral failures, and an evolving understanding of religious liberty.

That Christian public framework became especially important when conflict with Great Britain intensified.

For additional evidence concerning the Christian character of colonial America and the role of Christianity in the American Revolution, see Eric Metaxas, *Revolution: The Birth of the Greatest Nation in the History of the World* (2026).

3. PASTORS, CHRISTIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT, AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The American Revolution cannot be understood accurately if Christianity is removed from the story. Taxation, constitutional disputes, representation, English law, Enlightenment ideas, and economic concerns all mattered. But religion mattered greatly as well.

a. Christianity Helped Shape the Revolutionary Argument

The Library of Congress describes Christianity as playing a “major role” in the Revolution by providing moral sanction for resistance and records ministers serving as chaplains, political writers, legislators, convention delegates, members of Congress, and sometimes soldiers. (Library of Congress, Religion and the Founding of the American Republic, “Religion and the American Revolution.”)

Their reasoning often began with a biblical understanding of government.

Scripture teaches that civil authority comes from God and ordinarily deserves obedience (Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:13–17). But Romans 13 also describes government as God’s servant “for your good” (Rom. 13:4 CSB).

Government therefore possesses real authority, but rulers aren’t God. Nathan rebuked David, Elijah confronted Ahab, Daniel continued praying despite royal prohibition, and John the Baptist condemned Herod’s immorality (2 Sam. 12:1–7; 1 Kings 18:17–18; Dan. 6:10; Mark 6:18).

The apostles stated the controlling principle plainly:

(Acts 5:29 NASB) “We must obey God rather than men.”

b. Protestant Resistance Theory Predated the Revolution

Colonial ministers didn’t invent political resistance out of nothing.

Gary Steward’s *Justifying Revolution* traces Patriot clergy to a Protestant resistance tradition stretching back through the Reformation. Reformed resistance theory, disputes over political absolutism, natural-law arguments concerning self-defense, and British Protestant political thought all contributed to their reasoning. (Gary L. Steward, *Justifying Revolution: The Early American Clergy and Political Resistance* [Oxford University Press, 2021].)

Many ministers accordingly understood government in covenantal or compact terms: rulers and people possessed obligations, government existed for lawful purposes, and political authority didn't become unlimited merely because a ruler claimed it.

This political use of covenant language shouldn't be confused with claiming America was covenant Israel. Israel possessed a unique redemptive covenant established directly by God. Political covenant or compact reasoning concerned reciprocal obligations within civil government.

c. Ministers Were Preaching About Resistance Before Independence

In 1750, Boston minister Jonathan Mayhew preached "A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers," challenging the idea that Romans 13 required unconditional submission to oppressive rulers.

The Library of Congress calls it one of the most influential sermons in American history and says Mayhew's defense of resistance anticipated the position later taken by many Patriot ministers. (Library of Congress, "Resistance to Tyranny as a Christian Duty"; Steward, *Justifying Revolution*, chap. 1.)

More than twenty years before Lexington and Concord, therefore, a prominent American pulpit was publicly addressing whether Christian submission to government had limits.

John Adams expressed a related political distinction in his 1775 Novanglus essays, arguing that resistance to "usurpation and lawless violence" wasn't rebellion against lawful authority. (Massachusetts Historical Society, Adams Papers Digital Edition, John Adams, "V. To the Inhabitants of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay," February 20, 1775.)

d. Ministers Participated Directly in the Revolution

By 1776, prominent ministers were directly involved in the Patriot cause.

Presbyterian minister John Witherspoon, president of the College of New Jersey, preached "The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men" on a day of fasting appointed by the Continental Congress. He soon entered Congress, represented New Jersey from 1776 to 1782, and became the only clergyman and college president to sign the Declaration of Independence. The Library of Congress calls him the most important "political parson" of the Revolutionary period. (Princeton University Library, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men* [1776]; Library of Congress, "John Witherspoon.")

The influence of Patriot clergy became so conspicuous that Loyalist Peter Oliver later denounced the dissenting ministers supporting resistance as the "Black Regiment." The broader group is often referred to today as the "Black-Robed Regiment," a modern label referring to the black clerical robes commonly worn by Protestant ministers. It wasn't a literal military regiment, but a description of influential clergy whose sermons and public leadership helped provide religious and moral support for the Patriot cause. (Peter Oliver, *Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion* [c. 1781]; TeachingHistory.org "Black-Robed Regiment.")

Some ministers went beyond preaching and entered military service themselves.

Lutheran minister Peter Muhlenberg became perhaps the most famous example, serving as an officer in the Continental Army and later commanding a brigade at Yorktown. Presbyterian minister James Caldwell served as a Revolutionary chaplain, while other ministers served in legislatures, constitutional conventions, committees, and other public capacities. (Library of Congress, “A Fighting Parson” and “A Revolutionary Chaplain.”)

The “Black-Robed Regiment” therefore wasn’t an organized body of armed pastors. The name captures something historically important: Christian ministers were sufficiently influential in supporting the Revolution that even opponents of independence recognized the political power of the colonial pulpit.

e. Congress Openly Used Christian Language and Practices

The Continental Congress itself appointed chaplains, supported publication of a Bible, incorporated religious provisions into military regulations, and repeatedly proclaimed days of thanksgiving, fasting, and prayer.

Its May 17, 1776 fast proclamation called Americans to confession, repentance, and pardon through Jesus Christ. (Library of Congress, “Religion and the Congress of the Confederation.”)

That public use of Christianity is difficult to reconcile with the idea that religion was understood as something that should remain entirely behind church doors.

f. Not Every Christian Supported Independence

None of this means every Christian supported the Revolution.

Anglicans faced particular conflicts because clergy had sworn allegiance to the king, while many Quakers remained committed to pacifism. Patriot and Loyalist Christians disagreed vigorously about Scripture, conscience, lawful authority, resistance, and political duty.

That disagreement strengthens the historical point. Their central debate wasn’t whether Christianity had anything to say about government. It was what Christianity required them to do.

The Revolution therefore shouldn’t be reduced either to a purely secular Enlightenment revolt or a purely theological uprising. Multiple intellectual traditions contributed.

But the historical record demonstrates that Protestant political theology, clergy preaching, biblical reasoning, and Christian ideas about authority and resistance formed substantial parts of the Revolutionary argument.

Christianity was already in the public square.

That fact matters greatly when we turn to the Constitution and First Amendment.

4. THE DECLARATION, THE CONSTITUTION, AND THE FIRST AMENDMENT

a. The Declaration Openly Appeals to God

The Declaration of Independence shows that the Founding generation didn't speak as though public life had to be separated from religious belief.

The Declaration isn't a Christian confession, but neither is it an atheistic or religiously neutral document. It appeals to "Nature's God," a "Creator," the "Supreme Judge of the world," and "divine Providence."

Those references don't prove that every signer held orthodox Christian beliefs, but they establish that the Declaration openly appealed to God in explaining American independence. (National Archives, "Declaration of Independence: A Transcription.")

The public religious identity of its signers was also overwhelmingly Christian. A scholarly tabulation by James D. Davidson and Ralph E. Pyle classifies all 56 signers by affiliation with Christian denominations: 34 Anglican or Episcopalian, 13 Congregationalist, six Presbyterian, and one each Quaker, Roman Catholic, and Baptist. Denominational affiliation doesn't prove regeneration or orthodoxy, but it does establish public religious affiliation. (James D. Davidson and Ralph E. Pyle, *Ranking Faiths: Religious Stratification in America* [2011], 8, table 1.1.)

b. The Constitution Created a Civil Government, Not a Church

Eleven years later, the Constitution created the new federal government. Unlike many state constitutions, it contained no Christian profession of faith, and Article VI specifically provided that "no religious Test shall ever be required" for federal office. (U.S. Const. art. VI, cl. 3.)

That was an important protection of religious liberty. But it would be historically mistaken to read Article VI as though the Founders had therefore created a secular society in which Christianity was expected to disappear from public life.

State constitutions demonstrate why. Pennsylvania's 1776 Constitution required legislators to acknowledge God and affirm that the Old and New Testaments were "given by Divine inspiration," while Delaware required many officeholders to profess faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and acknowledge the inspiration of Scripture. (Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, § 10; Delaware Constitution of 1776, art. 22, Yale Law School, Avalon Project.)

The point isn't that such tests should be restored. The point is historical: the generation that prohibited religious tests for federal office lived among states that still maintained them.

c. The First Amendment Didn't Create a Religion-Free Public Square

The First Amendment says:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Originally, the amendment restricted the federal government rather than immediately abolishing state religious establishments.

Congress's Constitution Annotated notes that several states disestablished religion only after ratification of the First Amendment, with Massachusetts ending its system in 1833. (Constitution Annotated, “Early Interpretations of the Religion Clauses.”)

Whatever Christians today think about government-supported churches, the historical point is clear: the First Amendment wasn't originally understood as instantly creating a religion-free public square throughout America.

d. The First Congress Makes the Original Context Especially Clear

The behavior of the First Congress makes that point even clearer.

The Senate elected Episcopal Bishop Samuel Provoost as its first chaplain in April 1789, while the House elected Presbyterian minister William Linn in May.

That same Congress reenacted the Northwest Ordinance, which declared that “Religion, morality, and knowledge” were necessary to good government and human happiness. On September 25, 1789, Congress proposed the amendments that became the Bill of Rights, including the First Amendment. (United States Senate, “About the Senate Chaplain”; National Archives, “Northwest Ordinance”; “The Bill of Rights: A Transcription.”)

Only days later, after Congress requested a national day of thanksgiving and prayer, President George Washington issued his October 3, 1789, proclamation declaring it the “duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God.” He called Americans to thanksgiving, confession of national sins, prayer for good government, and the promotion of “true religion and virtue.” (George Washington, “Thanksgiving Proclamation,” October 3, 1789, Founders Online, National Archives.)

Congress maintained chaplains, affirmed religion and morality in the Northwest Ordinance, proposed the First Amendment, and requested a national day of prayer within the same period.

That doesn't mean the First Amendment permitted Congress to establish a national church or force Christianity upon anyone. It didn't.

But it strongly argues against interpreting the amendment as requiring Christianity to disappear from public life.

e. Religious Liberty Was Also a Founding Principle

In 1790, Washington wrote to the Jewish congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, that the government gave “to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.” Religious liberty wasn’t merely something Christians might graciously grant religious minorities; liberty of conscience belonged to citizens. (George Washington, “To the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island,” August 18, 1790, Founders Online.)

This demonstrates an important principle: a country can possess deep Christian foundations while protecting the liberty of Jews, unbelievers, and people of other religions.

Those ideas aren’t contradictory.

f. Jefferson’s “Wall of Separation” Must Be Read in Context

Thomas Jefferson’s famous phrase about a “wall of separation between Church & State” came from his 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association.

Jefferson was explaining the First Amendment’s protection of religious conscience from federal control. The phrase appears in Jefferson’s letter; it doesn’t appear in the Constitution. (Thomas Jefferson, “To the Danbury Baptist Association,” January 1, 1802, Founders Online.)

Jefferson’s own conduct also demonstrates that separation didn’t mean voluntary Christianity had to disappear from government property.

The Library of Congress records that while President, Jefferson attended Christian worship services held in the House of Representatives, allowed religious services in executive-branch buildings, and was followed in attending Capitol worship by James Madison. Christian worship was also conducted in the Supreme Court chamber. (Library of Congress, Religion and the Founding of the American Republic, “Religion and the Federal Government, Part 2.”)

Jefferson’s theology was unorthodox in important respects, but even his strong view of church-state separation wasn’t equivalent to removing voluntary religion from public life.

g. The Treaty of Tripoli Doesn’t Settle the Question

The Treaty of Tripoli is frequently cited as proof that America wasn’t founded within a Christian framework.

The official English version of the 1796 treaty contained the statement that “the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion.” That sentence is real and shouldn’t be hidden. (Treaty of Peace and Friendship with Tripoli, 1796, art. 11.) There is, however, an important complication. Hunter Miller’s examination of State Department records found that the Arabic original contains no corresponding Article 11 and called the discrepancy unexplained, noting significant problems with Joel Barlow’s translation. (Hunter Miller, “Notes on the Treaty with Tripoli, 1796,” *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, vol. 2 [1931].)

Even if the official English sentence is accepted exactly as written, it refers specifically to the government of the United States while assuring a Muslim government that America had no religious hostility toward Islam.

That is consistent with the federal government not being constituted as a Christian church. It doesn't establish that American society, population, institutions, or political culture lacked Christian foundations.

The replacement Treaty of Tripoli in 1805 contained no comparable statement. (Treaty of Peace and Amity with Tripoli, June 4, 1805.)

h. What Was the Founding Arrangement?

Taken together, the evidence points toward a careful conclusion.

The Constitution established no national church. It prohibited religious tests for federal office. The First Amendment protected free exercise and prevented Congress from establishing religion. Religious liberty increasingly became an important American principle.

At the same time, Christianity remained deeply present in public life. States retained religious establishments and tests. Congress employed chaplains. Government proclaimed days of prayer and thanksgiving. Presidents publicly acknowledged God. Early federal law spoke positively about religion and morality. Christian worship occurred in federal buildings.

The Founding arrangement therefore wasn't a theocracy, but neither was it the modern idea of a public square stripped of Christian influence.

Religious liberty developed within a society that remained overwhelmingly Christian in population, institutions, language, and moral assumptions.

That history gives us the context needed to evaluate the modern label "Christian nationalism."

5. WHAT "CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM" GETS WRONG—AND WHAT THE STRAW MAN GETS WRONG

There are genuine errors that Christians should reject, but there are also ordinary Christian beliefs that shouldn't be condemned merely because someone places them under the same label.

a. America Must Not Be Confused With Israel or the Church

America isn't the Church, and becoming an American doesn't make anyone a Christian. The Church consists of people redeemed by Christ from every nation, and salvation comes through Jesus Christ rather than citizenship or patriotism (Rev. 5:9–10; Rom. 10:9–13).

Likewise, America hasn't received Israel's unique covenant status.

b. Government Cannot Create Christians

Government can punish wrongdoing and preserve civil order, but it can't regenerate the human heart (Rom. 13:3–4).

Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples through proclamation and teaching, not forced conversion (Matt. 28:19–20).

Government therefore shouldn't attempt to compel anyone to profess Christianity.

c. Non-Christians Are Entitled to Impartial Justice

Christians should reject any idea that unbelievers deserve fewer basic civil rights simply because they aren't Christians.

Every human being bears God's image, and Scripture commands impartial justice (Gen. 1:27; Lev. 19:15).

If someone means national idolatry, forced conversion, government control of the Church, denial of justice to unbelievers, or treating America as covenant Israel when he uses "Christian nationalism," Christians should reject those things.

d. But Ordinary Christian Civic Participation Is Not Theocracy

The opposite error is assuming that anyone who recognizes America's Christian foundations, wants biblical morality to influence society, or votes according to Christian convictions must believe those extreme things.

Pew Research Center's findings show why that assumption is unwarranted. Among Americans who said the United States should be a "Christian nation," 48 percent described that primarily in terms of Christian beliefs and values guiding society, while only 6 percent described it specifically in terms of Christian-based laws and government. A majority—52 percent—also said the federal government should never declare any religion the official religion of the United States. (Pew Research Center, "45% of Americans Say U.S. Should Be a 'Christian Nation,'" October 27, 2022.)

Political scientist Nilay Saiya likewise argues that Christian Nationalism shouldn't be treated as one uniform political theology because people identified with the term can hold significantly different and even conflicting beliefs. (Nilay Saiya, "The Varieties of American Christian Nationalism," *Politics and Religion* 18, no. 2 [2025]: 171–189.)

e. The Straw Man Attacks Beliefs Many Christians Don't Hold

A Christian may believe that America was historically shaped by Christianity, that unborn life should be protected, that marriage possesses a God-given meaning, or that Christians should vote for policies most consistent with biblical principles.

None of those beliefs requires believing that America has replaced Israel, that unbelievers should be denied civil rights, or that Christianity should be imposed by force.

When such extreme positions are attached to ordinary Christian civic participation and the resulting package is condemned as "Christian nationalism," the argument attacks beliefs the Christian may never have held.

f. Modern Assumptions Shouldn't Be Projected Backward Onto History

The label can also create a kind of **cultural Mandela effect** in which modern assumptions are projected backward until people imagine that Christianity was always expected to remain private.

The history we have examined shows otherwise. Colonial governments openly recognized Christianity. Ministers preached on political questions. Congress appointed chaplains and called the population to prayer. The Founding generation spoke openly about God, providence, religion, and morality. The First Amendment protected religious liberty without creating a religion-free public square.

None of that means we should reproduce every colonial practice. It does mean we should tell the truth about the past.

g. Christians Should Participate in Public Life as Christians

Scripture says:

(Col. 3:17 NASB) "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

"Whatever you do" includes citizenship.

Christians don't stop being Christians when they vote, contact a legislator, serve on a school board, argue a case, or hold public office.

Nor must Christians adopt secular assumptions before they are permitted to participate. Every citizen approaches public questions with beliefs about truth, morality, human nature, justice, and government.

Christian citizens should approach those questions as Christians.

That isn't theocracy. It is Christian citizenship.

h. Test the Belief, Not the Label

The proper response is therefore to reject both errors.

Christians should reject nationalism that places the nation above Christ, confuses America with the Church or Israel, coerces religious belief, or denies justice to others.

But we should also reject the straw man that treats Christian influence, voting, advocacy, or recognition of America's Christian foundations as inherently dangerous.

The label doesn't decide the question. The actual belief does.

(1 Thess. 5:21–22 NASB) “But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.”

6. APPLYING I.R.A.C.P. TO CHRISTIANITY, AMERICA, AND “CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM”

We now have enough historical background to apply I.R.A.C.P.

I — ISSUE: WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

The Issue can be stated simply: Should Christians recognize America’s Christian foundations and seek to influence government according to biblical convictions without confusing America with Israel, the Church, or the kingdom of God?

R — RULE: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

a. God Is Sovereign Over Government

God is sovereign over nations and governments (Dan. 2:21; Rom. 13:1). Government possesses genuine but delegated authority.

When human authority commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands:

(Acts 5:29 NASB) “We must obey God rather than men.”

b. America Is Not Covenant Israel

Israel received a unique covenant and role in redemptive history (Ex. 19:5–6; Deut. 7:6). No modern nation possesses that status.

The New Testament identifies Christ’s redeemed people as God’s “holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9).

c. Christians Are Called to Influence the World Around Them

Jesus calls His followers salt and light, while Scripture commands believers to do good, speak truth, seek justice, and defend others (Matt. 5:13–16; Eph. 4:15; Prov. 31:8–9).

d. Every Part of Life Belongs Under Christ’s Lordship

Paul writes:

(Col. 3:17 NASB) “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Citizenship is part of “whatever you do.”

A — ANALYSIS: HOW DOES SCRIPTURE APPLY?

a. Christian Foundations Don't Make America Israel

America can possess genuine Christian historical foundations without being covenant Israel. The evidence shows that Christianity deeply influenced colonial government, education, law, political preaching, the Revolution, and the early Republic. Recognizing that history doesn't give America Israel's unique place in redemptive history.

b. Christian Political Participation Isn't Theocracy

American citizens may vote, speak, petition, organize, advocate, and seek office. Paul himself lawfully used his Roman citizenship and legal rights when appropriate (Acts 16:37–39; 22:25–29; 25:10–12).

Christians therefore don't need to set aside biblical convictions before entering public life. If Scripture shapes what we believe about human life, marriage, justice, family, truth, and government, those convictions will naturally affect how we vote and participate.

c. Political Influence Isn't Forced Conversion

Government can restrain wrongdoing, but it cannot regenerate sinners. Making disciples belongs to the gospel (Rom. 13:3–4; Matt. 28:19–20). Seeking laws consistent with biblical morality therefore isn't the same thing as forcing someone to become a Christian.

d. The Label Doesn't Determine Whether Something Is Biblical

If "Christian nationalism" means national idolatry, coerced religion, denial of justice, or treating America as covenant Israel, Christians should reject it. But if the label is applied merely because Christians recognize America's Christian heritage or participate politically according to Scripture, the label doesn't make those actions wrong.

C — CONCLUSION: WHAT SHOULD WE CONCLUDE?

Christians may recognize America's Christian foundations, love their country, and seek to influence government according to biblical convictions without making America an idol, confusing it with Israel or the Church, or establishing a theocracy.

America cannot save anyone. Our highest allegiance belongs to Christ (Phil. 3:20).

But Christians living in a constitutional republic should participate as Christians. We may seek our nation's good, pray for its leaders, use our lawful rights, and bring our citizenship under Christ's lordship (Jer. 29:7; 1 Tim. 2:1–2; Acts 22:25–29; Col. 3:17).

The question isn't whether someone has been called a "Christian nationalist." The question is whether what he actually believes and does agrees with Scripture.

P — POLICY: WHY IS GOD’S WAY GOOD?

God’s way protects us from opposite errors.

It protects us from political idolatry because no country, party, leader, or government can replace Christ. But it also protects us from withdrawal because Christ calls His people to be salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13–16).

Christians can therefore love their country without worshiping it, participate in government without trusting government to save, protect religious liberty without hiding their own faith, and seek righteous laws without believing laws can regenerate the heart.

God’s order keeps everything in its proper place: government governs, the Church proclaims the gospel, citizens participate, and Christ remains Lord over all.

7. ANSWERING COMMON OBJECTIONS ABOUT "CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM"

What follows are common objections regarding "Christian nationalism" that flow from the discussion above.

Objection 1: "America wasn't founded as a Christian nation."

That objection depends upon what is meant by "Christian nation."

If it means that America was established as a church, received a covenant from God like Israel, or required every citizen to be a Christian, then this study has already rejected that claim. America isn't Israel or the Church.

But that isn't the historical claim being made.

As we have already seen, America arose from an overwhelmingly Christian and predominantly Protestant civilization.

Christianity was deeply embedded in colonial government, law, education, morality, worship, political thought, and public life for generations long before independence. Christian ideas also played a substantial role in the Revolution and remained openly present during the Founding and early Republic.

Other influences certainly existed. English constitutional traditions, classical political thought, Enlightenment ideas, economic interests, and other historical forces all contributed to America's development.

But the existence of additional influences doesn't erase Christianity any more than the existence of several ingredients means one of the principal ingredients isn't really there.

Nor does the Treaty of Tripoli erase that history. As discussed above, its language concerned the federal government in a diplomatic agreement with a Muslim nation. It doesn't establish that the American people, culture, institutions, law, education, or political thought lacked Christian foundations.

The historical evidence therefore supports a careful conclusion.

America wasn't covenant Israel or the Church. But America did possess genuine and extensive Christian historical foundations.

Objection 2: "Most of the Founders were Deists."

That claim is frequently repeated, but it isn't supported by the historical picture we have already examined.

Deism certainly existed in eighteenth-century America, and some prominent figures held religious beliefs that departed significantly from orthodox Christianity. Those facts shouldn't be hidden.

But the existence of some prominent unorthodox thinkers doesn't establish that most of the Founders were Deists.

As discussed earlier, the Library of Congress describes American Deists during this period as only a **"minority within a minority."**

The public religious affiliations of the Founding generation were overwhelmingly Christian. A scholarly tabulation cited above classifies all fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence by affiliation with Christian denominations—Anglican or Episcopalian, Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Roman Catholic, or Baptist.

Denominational affiliation by itself doesn't prove personal conversion or theological orthodoxy.

But neither should we move in the opposite direction and call men Deists merely because they lived during the Enlightenment, used natural-law language, or held some theological views with which orthodox Christians would disagree.

"Founder" also refers to a much larger group than a handful of famous names. It includes signers, delegates, legislators, political writers, ministers, military leaders, state constitution-makers, and others who participated in the revolutionary and founding era.

A few prominent exceptions cannot accurately be turned into a description of the whole group.

The evidence supports saying that "minority within a minority" of Founders held unorthodox or possibly Deistic beliefs.

The evidence simply doesn't support the sweeping claim that most of the Founders were Deists.

Objection 3: "Separation of church and state means Christianity should stay out of government and politics."

That confuses limiting government's power over religion with limiting the political rights of religious citizens.

Christians are citizens too.

Under the American constitutional order, Christians possess the same rights as everyone else to speak, vote, petition, organize, advocate, support candidates, seek public office, argue cases, contact government officials, and attempt to persuade their fellow citizens.

Nothing in the Constitution requires Christians to become secular before exercising those rights.

As discussed above, the Constitution created a civil government rather than a national church, Article VI prohibited religious tests for federal office, and the First Amendment prohibited Congress from establishing religion **while protecting its free exercise.**

But the Founding generation didn't understand those protections to mean Christianity had to disappear from public life. The same generation maintained congressional chaplains, called for prayer and thanksgiving, publicly acknowledged God, and permitted Christian worship in federal buildings.

The constitutional principle therefore protects religious liberty. It doesn't create a political disability for Christians.

An atheist may enter public life as an atheist. A Muslim may participate as a Muslim. A secular progressive may advocate according to his convictions. A Christian has the same right to participate according to Christian convictions.

Christians aren't seeking a special privilege when they do so. They are exercising the same constitutional rights as everyone else.

Objection 4: "Trying to base laws on biblical morality is imposing your religion on everyone else."

Every law involves value judgments.

Whenever government prohibits something, requires something, protects something, punishes something, or recognizes a right, it has made a judgment that one result is preferable to another.

Those value judgments rest upon moral judgments about what is right and wrong, just and unjust, good and harmful.

And those moral judgments arise from a person's underlying beliefs about reality, human nature, moral authority, human dignity, justice, and the purpose of government. Those beliefs are ultimately connected to a person's religion or lack thereof and the worldview that follows from it.

There is therefore no completely worldview-neutral political position.

A secular moral conclusion doesn't become neutral merely because it doesn't cite Scripture.

The real question isn't whether moral beliefs will influence law. They inevitably will.

The real questions are whether a particular moral judgment is true, whether the proposed law is just, and whether the matter properly falls within government's authority.

Christians have the same right as everyone else to participate in that argument. If Scripture shapes what we believe about human life, marriage, family, property, justice, truth, or government, Christians shouldn't be expected to abandon those convictions before entering the political process.

That still isn't the same thing as forcing someone to become a Christian.

Government can restrain outward wrongdoing, but it cannot regenerate the human heart (Rom. 13:3–4). Christianity advances through the gospel, not compulsory conversion (Matt. 28:19–20).

Christians may therefore seek laws consistent with biblical morality while also defending religious liberty and impartial justice for people who reject Christianity.

Everyone brings moral convictions into politics. Christians shouldn't be uniquely forbidden from bringing theirs.

Objection 5: "Christian political involvement is Christian nationalism or theocracy."

That depends upon what someone actually believes and proposes.

If "Christian nationalism" means putting America above Christ, treating America as covenant Israel, forcing people to profess Christianity, or denying justice or basic civil rights to unbelievers, Christians should reject it.

This study already has.

But those positions shouldn't simply be attributed to Christians because they recognize America's Christian foundations, vote according to biblical convictions, advocate laws consistent with biblical morality, or want Christianity to have a legitimate voice in public life.

That is not theocracy.

Christians participating through elections, legislation, courts, public debate, petitions, political organization, and other constitutional processes are participating in the same governmental system available to everyone else.

A secular citizen doesn't establish "secular theocracy" merely by persuading enough voters to enact a law reflecting secular moral convictions. Likewise, a Christian doesn't establish a theocracy merely because Christian arguments persuade other citizens.

The constitutional process doesn't become illegitimate when Christians participate successfully in it.

Nor should secularism receive a privileged position in which secular moral judgments are treated as neutral while Christian moral judgments are treated as dangerous simply because they come from religious convictions.

Christians should seek no special right to rule over others.

But neither should Christians accept a special disability requiring them to leave their faith behind before participating in government.

The proper question therefore is not, "Can someone call this Christian nationalism?"

The proper questions are: What does the person actually believe? What is he actually proposing? Is it true? Is it just? Is it constitutional? And, most importantly for the Christian, is it consistent with Scripture?

Test the belief, not the label (1 Thess. 5:21–22).

Objection 6: “Christians should just preach the gospel instead of getting involved in politics.”

The concern contains an important truth. Politics must never replace the gospel.

No election can forgive sin. No political party can give eternal life. No government can regenerate the human heart. Humanity’s deepest problem is sin, and salvation comes only through Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:3–4).

But keeping the gospel first doesn’t mean ignoring every other responsibility God gives us.

As discussed earlier in this study, Scripture commands Christians to be salt and light, do good, defend others, seek justice, pray for rulers, respect legitimate government, and faithfully use the opportunities God provides (Matt. 5:13–16; Prov. 31:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:1–2; Gal. 6:10).

Paul’s citizenship was in heaven, yet he still asserted his Roman citizenship, exercised legal rights, appealed to Caesar, and proclaimed truth before government officials (Phil. 3:20; Acts 16:37–39; 22:25–29; 24:24–25; 25:10–12).

American Christians possess opportunities for civic participation that Paul generally didn’t have. Our constitutional system permits ordinary citizens to vote, petition, advocate, organize, seek office, use courts, and help determine who governs them.

Those opportunities are forms of stewardship.

If Christians lawfully possess those opportunities, there is no biblical reason they should voluntarily surrender them to citizens with other worldviews.

The gospel and government accomplish different things.

The gospel saves sinners.

Government can restrain evil, punish wrongdoing, protect innocent people, and preserve civil order (Rom. 13:3–4).

Christians shouldn’t confuse those functions.

But neither should we use the importance of evangelism as an excuse to abandon other responsibilities God has given us.

The gospel is first. First doesn’t mean only.

8. CONCLUSIONS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY, AMERICA, AND “CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM”

Several conclusions follow from the historical evidence and biblical analysis.

a. America Is Not Israel or the Church

America received no special covenant from God, and American citizenship doesn't make anyone a Christian. The Church consists of Christ's redeemed people from **every** nation, and our highest allegiance belongs to Him (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 5:9–10; Phil. 3:20).

b. America Has Genuine Christian Historical Foundations

America arose from an overwhelmingly Christian and predominantly Protestant civilization. Christianity deeply influenced colonial government, education, law, public morality, the Revolution, and the early Republic. Recognizing that history doesn't require claiming every Founder was Christian, ignoring America's sins, or treating America as covenant Israel.

c. Religious Liberty Doesn't Require a Secular Public Square

The Constitution established no national church, prohibited religious tests for federal office, and protected free exercise while limiting federal establishment of religion. Yet the Founding generation maintained congressional chaplains, proclaimed days of prayer and thanksgiving, acknowledged God publicly, and permitted Christian worship in public buildings. Religious liberty and public Christian influence weren't opposites.

d. Christians May Participate in Government as Christians

Christians possess the same civic rights as other citizens. We may vote, petition, advocate, organize, seek office, and support just laws. Scripture doesn't require Christians to become secular in public life. We are to honor Christ in “whatever” we do (Col. 3:17).

e. Christ Must Remain Lord Over Our Political Life

Christians must reject coerced religion, injustice toward unbelievers, and confusing America with Israel or the Church. But ordinary Christian civic participation doesn't become dangerous merely because someone labels it “Christian nationalism.”

The label isn't our standard. Scripture is.

C. ABORTION

1. APPLYING THE I.R.A.C.P. METHOD TO THE QUESTION OF ABORTION

I — ISSUE: WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Abortion is actually one of the simpler cultural issues to understand once we get past the language surrounding it.

The debate is often framed with phrases such as “choice,” “reproductive freedom,” “bodily autonomy,” “reproductive health care,” or “ending a pregnancy.” Those phrases can obscure the central issue because they describe abortion without plainly identifying what is being ended.

The central Issue is simple:

What is the unborn child, and is it morally permissible intentionally to end that life?

If there were no living human being developing in the womb, there would be little moral controversy. An elective abortion is sought precisely because a pregnancy exists and the developing child will otherwise continue toward birth.

Calling abortion a “choice” doesn’t answer the question. Of course a choice is involved. The question is what is being chosen.

Calling abortion “health care” doesn’t answer it either. A label doesn’t determine whether an action is morally right.

Biblical discernment requires us to look past the circumlocution, or roundabout language, and ask plainly:

What is being done, to whom is it being done, and what does God say about it?

R — RULE: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

First, human beings possess special value because God created us in His image:

(Gen. 1:27 CSB) “So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.”

Human worth therefore doesn’t depend upon size, age, intelligence, health, independence, usefulness, or whether another person wants us.

Our dignity comes from God (Gen. 1:26–27; James 3:9).

Second, Scripture treats life in the womb as human life that God knows and forms. David wrote:

(Ps. 139:13 NASB) “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb.”

Notice David’s words. He doesn’t describe something in the womb that would eventually become him. He says God formed “me” in “my mother’s womb.” He continues by saying that God saw his “unformed substance” while he was still developing before birth (Ps. 139:15–16 NASB).

The New Testament is equally clear. When the pregnant Mary visited Elizabeth, Scripture says:

(Luke 1:41 CSB) “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped inside her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Elizabeth then said:

(Luke 1:44 CSB) “For you see, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped for joy inside me.”

John is called a “baby” while still inside Elizabeth. Luke uses the same Greek word, *brephos*, for the unborn John and the newborn Jesus (Luke 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16). Scripture therefore speaks of human life before and after birth with continuity.

Third, God forbids the intentional taking of innocent human life:

(Ex. 20:13 NASB) “You shall not murder.”

Scripture also repeatedly condemns the shedding of innocent blood and commands us to defend those who cannot defend themselves (Deut. 19:10; Prov. 6:16–17; 24:11–12; 31:8–9).

These Rules give us the biblical standard.

A — ANALYSIS: HOW DOES SCRIPTURE APPLY?

The biological facts fit naturally with what Scripture teaches.

Human development is continuous. At fertilization, sperm and egg unite and a new human organism begins developing. *Zygote*, *embryo*, and *fetus* describe stages of human development, just as *infant*, *child*, *adolescent*, and *adult* describe later stages. (Mark G. Torchia and T. V. N. Persaud, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*, 12th ed. [Elsevier, 2024].)

The unborn child is also biologically distinct from the mother. At fertilization, genetic material from the mother and father combines, forming the developing child’s genome. The child therefore isn’t simply another organ or piece of the mother’s tissue. He or she is a developing human organism living within and depending upon the mother. (Ronan O’Rahilly and Fabiola Müller, *Human Embryology & Teratology*, 3rd ed. [Wiley-Liss, 2001].)

Pregnancy therefore involves more than one human body. In other words, **it is a scientific fact that the mother and the baby have different DNA and therefore the baby is not merely part of the mother's body.**

Science tells us what is developing in the womb. Scripture tells us why that human life matters. Human beings are made in God's image, and God speaks of life in the womb as life He forms and knows (Gen. 1:27; Ps. 139:13–16).

The unborn child is smaller, younger, less developed, and more dependent than a newborn. But none of those differences changes what the child is. Every human being passes through stages of development and dependence.

The moral question therefore isn't merely whether the mother has choices. It is whether one person's choice may intentionally end the innocent life of another human being.

C — CONCLUSION: WHAT SHOULD WE CONCLUDE?

The Conclusion follows directly from the biblical Rules and the Analysis:

Elective abortion is biblically sinful because it intentionally ends innocent developing human life.

The unborn child is a distinct developing human being whom Scripture describes as known and formed by God (Ps. 139:13–16; Luke 1:41–44). God forbids murder, condemns the shedding of innocent blood, and commands His people to defend those who cannot defend themselves (Ex. 20:13; Prov. 6:16–17; 24:11–12).

Christians should therefore oppose elective abortion and defend unborn children. But defending the child doesn't mean abandoning the mother.

P — POLICY: WHY IS GOD'S WAY GOOD?

God's way is good because it protects human beings when they are weakest.

An unborn child has no voice or ability to defend himself. His complete dependence doesn't make his life worth less; it gives stronger people greater responsibility to protect him. Scripture says:

(Prov. 31:8 KJV) "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction."

God's way also refuses to place the whole burden upon the mother. Fathers have responsibilities toward their children (1 Tim. 5:8). Families and churches should help women facing difficult pregnancies and bear their burdens with them (Gal. 6:2, 10; James 2:15–16). Christians who urge a frightened woman to choose life should also be willing to help her care for that life.

The gospel also offers real forgiveness to anyone who has participated in an abortion. A woman who has had an abortion may carry deep guilt and regret, but abortion isn't an unforgivable sin. If she repents and believes in Jesus Christ, she can be completely forgiven.

Scripture says:

(Acts 10:43 NASB) "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

John likewise writes:

(1 John 1:9 NASB) "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The same grace is available to a father who encouraged or pressured a woman to have an abortion, a medical professional who participated in one, or anyone else who bears responsibility.

The gospel doesn't minimize sin. Christ died for our sins, and forgiveness is offered to those who repent and believe in Him (Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:9–13; 1 Cor. 15:3–4).

A Christian woman who had an abortion in the past therefore doesn't have to spend the rest of her life trying to pay for a sin Christ has forgiven.

(Rom. 8:1 CSB) "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus,"

The Christian response to abortion therefore joins truth with grace: protect the child, help the mother, hold fathers responsible, call sin what God calls it, and point sinners to the forgiveness found in Jesus Christ.

2. COMMON OBJECTIONS IN FAVOR OF ABORTION

Several objections to the biblical position on abortion come up repeatedly. Each deserves an answer, but they eventually return us to the same central question: What is the unborn child?

Objection 1: "It's my body."

A woman's body certainly matters, and she deserves dignity, protection, and proper medical care. But as we have already seen, pregnancy involves another developing human body. The unborn child is biologically distinct from the mother and isn't simply one of her organs.

The mother and baby have different DNA. The child is inside the mother and completely dependent upon her, but the child isn't simply the mother's body.

Dependence doesn't erase humanity. A newborn also depends upon other people for survival. Scripture grounds human dignity in being made in God's image, not in independence (Gen. 1:27).

Objection 2: “It’s only a fetus” or “It’s just a clump of cells.”

The terms “zygote,” “embryo,” and “fetus” describe successive stages of human development, not different kinds of organisms. Human development proceeds continuously through these stages. (Torchia and Persaud, *The Developing Human*, 12th ed.)

Likewise, saying that an embryo consists of cells doesn’t tell us what it is. Every human body consists of cells. The relevant question is what kind of living organism those cells make up. The answer is a developing human being.

Objection 3: “The unborn child isn’t a person until viability.”

Viability tells us whether an unborn child may be able to survive outside the womb under particular circumstances. It doesn’t tell us whether the child is human.

Viability can change according to gestational age and available medical technology. Human worth cannot reasonably depend upon whether advanced medical care happens to be available.

Scripture gives us a firmer standard: human dignity comes from being made in God’s image (Gen. 1:27).

Objection 4: “What about rape or incest?”

Rape and incest are terrible crimes. A woman who has suffered such violence deserves compassion, protection, help, and justice. But the unborn child didn’t commit the crime.

Scripture teaches:

(Deut. 24:16 CSB) “Fathers are not to be put to death for their children, and children are not to be put to death for their fathers; each person will be put to death for his own sin.”

The circumstances of conception may be horrifying, but they don’t change the humanity of the child conceived. Justice should be directed toward the offender, not the innocent child.

Objection 5: “What about severe disability?”

A diagnosis of Down syndrome, serious illness, or another disability doesn’t make an unborn child less human.

If human value depends upon intelligence, health, ability, or independence, the same reasoning could also be used against disabled people after birth. Scripture gives human beings their fundamental dignity because they are made in God’s image (Gen. 1:27).

Objection 6: “What if the mother’s life is in danger?”

A genuine medical emergency must be distinguished from an elective abortion.

Some pregnancy complications require treatment to save the mother even when the unborn child tragically cannot survive. An ectopic pregnancy, for example, cannot be carried to term and can become life-threatening if untreated. (Aparna Sridhar, M.D., “Ectopic Pregnancy,” *Merck Manual Consumer Version*, reviewed May 2025, updated July 2026.)

Christians should seek to preserve both lives whenever possible. When that is medically impossible, necessary treatment aimed at saving the mother shouldn’t simply be treated as morally identical to an elective abortion intended to end an otherwise continuing pregnancy.

Objection 7: “Jesus never said abortion was wrong.”

This objection rests upon a serious misunderstanding of who Jesus is. Jesus isn’t merely a moral teacher who appeared for the first time in the New Testament. He is the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity (Matt. 28:19; John 1:1–3, 14; 8:58; 10:30; 17:5; 20:28; Col. 1:15–17; Phil. 2:5–11; Heb. 1:2–3, 8–12).

(John 1:1 NASB) “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Jesus existed before His incarnation, and all things were created through Him (John 1:1–3; Col. 1:16–17). Therefore, we cannot separate Jesus from the moral commands God gave in the Old Testament.

The command:

(Ex. 20:13 NASB) “You shall not murder.”

is the command of the triune God. The eternal Son didn’t disagree with it at Sinai and then arrive in the New Testament with a different moral standard.

More importantly, Jesus explicitly reaffirmed the command during His earthly ministry:

(Matt. 19:18 CSB) “Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness;”

Jesus also quoted the prohibition against murder in the Sermon on the Mount and then went deeper, condemning the sinful anger of the heart that lies behind violence (Matt. 5:21–22).

So the claim that Jesus was not recorded as having specifically condemned abortion proves nothing. Jesus condemned murder, and as the eternal Son He shares fully in the divine authority of the God who gave the command against murder.

The relevant question remains whether abortion intentionally takes innocent human life. If it does, Jesus has already given us the moral principle by which it must be judged.

Objection 8: “The Bible never specifically says, ‘Do not have an abortion.’”

The Bible doesn't contain that exact modern sentence, but it doesn't need to list every possible method of taking innocent human life. Scripture teaches that human beings bear God's image (Gen. 1:27), describes God forming human life in the womb (Ps. 139:13–16), calls the unborn John a “baby” (Luke 1:41, 44), forbids murder (Ex. 20:13; Matt. 19:18), condemns innocent bloodshed (Prov. 6:16–17), and commands us to protect those in danger (Prov. 24:11–12). Biblical discernment takes those truths together and applies them to abortion.

Objection 9: “You’re imposing your religious beliefs on other people.”

Every law involves moral judgments about what people may and may not do to others. Laws against murder, assault, theft, abuse, and abandonment all restrict personal freedom because another person is involved.

The abortion question therefore can't be dismissed simply by calling opposition to abortion “religious.” The biological question still must be answered: Is another human life involved?

The biological fact that the unborn child is a developing human organism doesn't depend upon Christianity. The biblical conclusion is that this human life possesses God-given dignity and therefore should be protected (Gen. 1:27; Ex. 20:13).

Objection 10: “Christians only care about babies until they’re born.”

Sometimes Christians have failed mothers and children who needed help. When that happens, the proper response is repentance and greater faithfulness (James 2:15–16).

But failing to help someone after birth wouldn't make killing that person before birth right.

The biblical position requires both protecting unborn children and helping mothers and families. Christians are commanded to bear burdens, meet genuine needs, and care for their families (Gal. 6:2, 10; 1 Tim. 5:8; 1 John 3:17–18).

That is the consistent position.

The objections differ, but they all return us to the same basic question: What is the unborn child?

If the unborn child is a developing human being, changing the terminology or pointing to difficult circumstances doesn't change what that child is. Biblical discernment requires us to protect innocent human life, show genuine compassion toward mothers in difficult circumstances, and proclaim that forgiveness and new life are available to every repentant sinner who trusts in Jesus Christ.

D. RACISM

1. APPLYING THE I.R.A.C.P. METHOD TO RACISM

I — ISSUE: WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Few words in modern culture carry more emotional weight than “racism.” Genuine racism is evil and should be condemned. But the word is also sometimes used so broadly that merely disagreeing about racial issues, questioning a race-based policy, or insisting that people be treated by the same standards can itself be called “racist.”

As with “Christian nationalism,” a loaded label cannot do our thinking for us. We first need to define what we mean. For purposes of this study, **racism means believing or acting as though a person or group is inherently superior or inferior because of race, skin color, ancestry, or ethnicity, or treating people partially on that basis.**

This requires an important distinction concerning culture.

No ethnic group is inherently superior to another. But cultures are made up of beliefs, customs, and practices, and those practices can be judged morally. A culture that accepts something God condemns isn’t beyond criticism merely because that practice is cultural. Loving people doesn’t require approving everything their culture believes or does (Isa. 5:20; Eph. 4:15).

There is also good reason to question whether “race,” as the word is commonly used, even describes a clear biological reality. Modern genetics recognizes real ancestry and human biological variation, but commonly used racial categories don’t divide mankind into separate biological races.

The National Human Genome Research Institute describes race as a social construct, and the National Academies states that race isn’t a scientifically valid measure of the structure of human genetic variation. (National Human Genome Research Institute, “Race,” *Talking Glossary of Genetic Terms*; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Using Population Descriptors in Genetics and Genomics Research* [2023].)

Long before modern genetics, Scripture gave us a much simpler picture of mankind. Paul said:

(Acts 17:26 NASB) “and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,”

Biblically, there is one human family descended from the same original parents. We have different nations, peoples, languages, families, cultures, and physical characteristics, but we are all human beings created by the same God.

The central Issue is therefore: **How should Christians understand human differences and treat people of different skin colors, ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, and cultures according to Scripture?**

R — RULE: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

a. Every human being is made in God's image.

(Gen. 1:27 CSB) "So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female."

Human dignity therefore doesn't increase or decrease according to skin color, ancestry, nationality, wealth, intelligence, or social position (Gen. 1:26–27; James 3:9).

b. All mankind shares a common origin.

It bears repeating that Paul told the Athenians:

(Acts 17:26 NASB) "and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,"

There aren't different classes of humanity created with different levels of worth. We are one human family.

c. God expressly forbids partiality.

(Lev. 19:15 NASB) "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly."

Notice that biblical justice doesn't correct one form of partiality by practicing another. God forbids favoring the rich **and** favoring the poor. The standard is fair judgment (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:16–17). The New Testament repeats the same principle:

(James 2:1 CSB) "My brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ."

God Himself "does not show favoritism" (Rom. 2:11 CSB; see also Acts 10:34–35).

d. Jesus commands us to love our neighbor.

(Matt. 22:39 NASB) "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus deliberately illustrated that command with the Good Samaritan, making a despised outsider the example of neighbor-love (Luke 10:25–37).

Jesus also gave what we commonly call the Golden Rule:

(Matt. 7:12 CSB) "Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Skin color, ancestry, nationality, or culture doesn't create an exception.

e. The gospel unites believers from every people and nation.

John saw Christ praised because He purchased people:

(Rev. 5:9 NASB) “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”

In Christ, ethnic background doesn’t determine a believer’s standing before God (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). The gospel doesn’t erase every cultural or national distinction, but it destroys any basis for believing one ethnicity has greater spiritual worth before God.

f. Scripture teaches that every group consists of sinners.

The Bible says:

(Rom. 3:10 NASB) “There is none righteous, not even one...”

(Rom. 3:23 KJV) “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God...”

No skin color possesses a monopoly on either righteousness or sin.

A — ANALYSIS: HOW DOES SCRIPTURE APPLY?

The biblical picture of mankind is very different from racial theories that divide humanity into groups with different inherent worth.

God “made from one man every nation of mankind” (Acts 17:26 NASB). Every person bears His image (Gen. 1:27). Biblically, our common humanity is more fundamental than the racial categories human societies have created.

Modern genetics points in the same general direction. Human ancestry and physical differences are real, but racial categories such as “white,” “black,” or “Asian” don’t represent neat, separate biological divisions of mankind. Genetic variation is continuous and overlapping, and the National Academies describes race as a socially constructed designation rather than a reliable measure of genetic ancestry.

That doesn’t mean racial categories have had no real-world effects. Human beings have used such categories to treat one another differently, sometimes with terrible consequences. But a socially powerful classification doesn’t become a God-created hierarchy merely because societies have used it for centuries.

Scripture gives us a better starting point: **one human family, one image of God, and one sinful human condition** (Gen. 1:27; Acts 17:26; Rom. 3:23).

That last truth is especially important when discussing the history of racism.

American slavery, segregation, and racial discrimination were real evils and shouldn’t be minimized. But racial and ethnic prejudice aren’t uniquely American sins, nor are they sins unique to white people.

History across the world contains slavery, conquest, ethnic hatred, tribal warfare, caste systems, segregation, persecution, and discrimination among many different peoples.

Even the United Nations, approaching the subject from a secular perspective, acknowledges that racism, xenophobia, and related discrimination exist across societies throughout the world. (United Nations, “Background: The Road to #FightRacism.”)

That history shouldn’t surprise Christians. The Bible already told us:

(Rom. 3:23 NASB) “[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”

Every people group is made up of sinners. Therefore, every people group is capable of pride, hatred, tribalism, prejudice, oppression, favoritism, and injustice.

No group gets to stand outside Romans 3:23.

This also means that **the solution to past racism cannot be more racism.**

If it was wrong to judge a black person by his skin color rather than his character, it doesn’t become right to judge a white person by his skin color rather than his character.

If racial preferences and disadvantages were wrong when used against one group, merely reversing the favored and disfavored groups doesn’t remove the underlying partiality.

God’s command is:

(Lev. 19:15 CSB) “Do not act unjustly when deciding a case. Do not be partial to the poor or give preference to the rich; judge your neighbor fairly.”

The answer to partiality is impartiality.

This leads to what we might call **biblical meritocracy**. By that term, we obviously don’t mean that anyone earns salvation by merit. Salvation is entirely by grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8–9).

In ordinary civil, educational, and employment matters, however, people should generally be evaluated according to relevant truth, character, conduct, ability, and qualifications rather than race or skin color.

When Moses selected leaders, he was told to look for “able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain” (Ex. 18:21 NASB). Israel was likewise told to choose men who were “wise and discerning and experienced” (Deut. 1:13 NASB). Those are qualifications based upon character and ability.

This doesn’t mean past injustice should be ignored. Scripture requires us to tell the truth about wrongdoing and correct actual injustice (Isa. 1:17). Where a person has wronged another, restitution may also be appropriate (Num. 5:6–7; Luke 19:8).

But biblical justice doesn't assign personal guilt merely because someone has the same skin color as people who committed sins generations ago. Scripture says:

(Ezek. 18:20 NASB) "The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity;"

The same principle appears in Deuteronomy 24:16.

Consequences of past wrongdoing can certainly continue into later generations. But **consequences are not the same thing as inherited personal guilt**. We should correct specific injustices where they exist without declaring an individual morally guilty simply because he belongs to a particular racial group.

C — CONCLUSION: WHAT SHOULD WE CONCLUDE?

The Conclusion follows directly from the biblical Rules and the Analysis:

Racism is sinful because it denies the equal God-given dignity of human beings and violates Scripture's command against partiality.

All people descend from the same human family and bear the image of the same God (Gen. 1:27; Acts 17:26).

Therefore, no person is inherently superior or inferior because he is white, black, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, or belongs to any other racial or ethnic category.

Likewise, no person should be presumed guilty, innocent, virtuous, wicked, competent, or incompetent simply because of his skin color or ancestry.

History gives no group grounds for self-righteousness because Scripture has already told us why prejudice and oppression repeatedly appear among human beings: **we are all sinners** (Rom. 3:10, 23).

The Christian answer to racism is therefore not reversed racism. It is biblical impartiality—one standard of justice applied fairly to everyone (Lev. 19:15; James 2:1–9).

P — POLICY: WHY IS GOD'S WAY GOOD?

God's way is good because it begins with what unites mankind rather than what divides us.

Every person we meet is descended from the same human family and bears God's image (Gen. 1:27; Acts 17:26). That gives Christians a reason to treat every person with dignity regardless of appearance or ancestry.

God's way also gives us a workable standard of justice. We don't have to calculate how much moral worth someone possesses according to his racial group or how much historical guilt he inherited from people who looked like him.

We are commanded simply:

(Matt. 7:12 NASB) “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you,”

That doesn’t mean approving everything another person believes or does. Love isn’t the same thing as moral agreement. Scripture says love “does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6 NASB).

We can love our neighbor while disagreeing with his religion, politics, sexual morality, culture, or behavior (Matt. 22:39; Eph. 4:15).

God’s way therefore combines equal human dignity with moral truth.

We love everyone. We show partiality to no one. We judge conduct by the same biblical standard.

And we remember that the deepest problem isn’t one race against another. It is sinful human hearts that need Jesus Christ (Mark 7:20–23; Rom. 3:23).

2. ANSWERING COMMON OBJECTIONS REGARDING RACISM

Objection 1: “Race is a biological reality, so races are separate kinds of people.”

Human ancestry and biological variation are real, but the common racial categories used in society don’t divide humanity into separate biological kinds.

Modern genetics treats commonly used racial categories largely as social classifications rather than discrete genetic races. The National Human Genome Research Institute describes race as a “social construct,” while the National Academies concluded that “race is neither useful nor scientifically valid as a measure of the structure of human genetic variation.” (National Human Genome Research Institute, “Race,” Talking Glossary of Genetic Terms; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Using Population Descriptors in Genetics and Genomics Research: A New Framework for an Evolving Field* [2023]).

More importantly, Scripture settles the theological issue:

(Acts 17:26 NASB) “and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth,”

Whatever terminology society uses, biblically we belong to one human family.

Objection 2: “Only white people can be racist because racism requires power.”

Power can certainly make prejudice more destructive. A prejudiced government official may have greater ability to harm someone than a prejudiced private citizen.

But power doesn’t determine whether racial hatred or partiality is sinful.

Scripture forbids partiality without limiting the prohibition to one ethnicity or to people who possess institutional power (Lev. 19:15; James 2:1–9).

Any person can despise another person because of ancestry or skin color. Any group can believe itself superior to another. Any person can practice sinful partiality.

Romans 3:23 has no racial exception. Therefore, the claim that one racial group is inherently capable of racism while another is inherently incapable of it contradicts Scripture's universal teaching about sin.

Objection 3: "White people are inherently racist because they benefit from historical racism."

People can certainly benefit from circumstances they didn't create, and the effects of historical injustice can continue long after the original wrongdoers have died. But benefiting from circumstances isn't the same thing as personally committing the sin of racism.

The Bible assigns moral responsibility according to truth and actual conduct, not skin color. Children don't automatically bear their fathers' personal guilt (Deut. 24:16; Ezek. 18:20).

A white person can be racist. A black person can be racist. Anyone can be racist because everyone is a sinner capable of sinful partiality (Rom. 3:23; James 2:1–9).

The biblical question isn't, "What color is this person?" It is, "What does this person actually believe and do?"

Objection 4: "Past racism justifies race-conscious discrimination today."

Racial and ethnic prejudice have existed among all peoples throughout human history. No racial or ethnic group has a monopoly on either committing injustice or suffering from it. That is exactly what we should expect from Scripture, because sin is universal:

(Rom. 3:23 NASB) "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

Human beings of every nation and culture are capable of pride, tribalism, hatred, favoritism, oppression, slavery, and discrimination.

Scripture doesn't divide humanity into one permanently guilty racial group and other groups that are incapable of the same sins. God "made from one man every nation of mankind" (Acts 17:26 NASB), and every part of that one human family is fallen (Rom. 3:10, 23).

Past injustice should never be denied or minimized, whether it occurred in America or elsewhere in the world. Where identifiable people have been wronged, justice and appropriate restitution may be required (Num. 5:6–7; Luke 19:8).

But the biblical remedy for partiality isn't partiality in the opposite direction. God commands:

(Lev. 19:15 NASB) "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly."

Notice the principle: God doesn't correct one unjust preference by commanding another. He commands impartial justice. Nor does Scripture assign personal guilt to someone merely because other people of the same ancestry or skin color committed sins in the past:

(Ezek. 18:20 NASB) "The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity..."

The effects of past injustice may continue and should be dealt with truthfully where they actually exist. But inherited consequences aren't the same thing as inherited personal guilt.

Treating a person unfairly today because people who looked like him treated others unfairly in the past simply repeats the same underlying error: judging an individual according to racial identity rather than truth, conduct, and justice.

The answer to past racism—whether committed by whites, blacks, Asians, Native peoples, or any other group—is not more racism. The biblical answer is impartial justice: one standard applied fairly to everyone (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:16–17; Acts 10:34–35; James 2:1–9).

Objection 5: "Meritocracy is racist."

There is nothing racist about judging people according to relevant ability, character, conduct, experience, or qualifications rather than skin color. Scripture repeatedly values qualifications.

Moses was instructed to select leaders who were able, truthful, God-fearing, and opposed to dishonest gain (Ex. 18:21). Israel was told to choose people who were wise, discerning, and experienced (Deut. 1:13).

That is what we mean here by **biblical meritocracy**. It doesn't mean every person will have identical circumstances or opportunities, and it certainly doesn't mean salvation is earned by merit.

It means race itself shouldn't make someone more or less worthy of a job, education, office, punishment, reward, or respect. Where qualifications matter, use legitimate qualifications rather than racial preference.

That is much closer to biblical impartiality (Lev. 19:15; James 2:1–9).

Objection 6: “A difference in outcomes proves discrimination.”

A difference in outcomes by itself doesn't tell us why the difference exists. Biblical justice requires facts and truthful judgment rather than assumptions (Deut. 1:16–17; Prov. 18:13, 17).

If a law, employer, school, court, church, or other institution actually treats people unfairly because of race, that partiality should be corrected.

But Christians shouldn't declare someone guilty of racism merely because a statistical difference exists. We must examine the evidence and identify the actual cause.

Justice requires truth.

Objection 7: “Systemic racism means individual prejudice doesn't matter.”

Institutions and laws can certainly be unjust. Scripture explicitly condemns rulers who enact unjust laws:

(Isa. 10:1 CSB) “Woe to those enacting crooked statutes and writing oppressive laws!”

Therefore, if a law or institution treats people partially because of race, Christians should oppose that injustice.

But institutional injustice doesn't eliminate individual moral responsibility. Scripture addresses both unjust systems and sinful individuals (Isa. 10:1–2; James 2:1–9).

We shouldn't deny genuine institutional discrimination when evidence demonstrates it, nor should we assume institutional racism without examining the actual law, policy, or practice.

Again, biblical discernment requires evidence rather than labels.

Objection 8: “Loving your neighbor means accepting his culture and beliefs.”

No. Christians must love people from every nation and culture (Matt. 22:39; Luke 10:25–37). But people and ideas aren't the same thing.

Every person possesses God-given dignity. Every belief and cultural practice does not. Cultures can contain beautiful customs, wisdom, family loyalty, art, language, and traditions. They can also contain idolatry, sexual immorality, oppression, violence, dishonesty, or other practices Scripture condemns.

Christians should never despise a person because of his culture. But neither should we call evil good simply because something is culturally accepted (Isa. 5:20). Biblical love speaks “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15 NASB).

E. OTHER COMMON CULTURAL ISSUES

The cultural issues examined in this Study Guide are only examples. Many other questions can be worked through using the I.R.A.C.P. method. The following are common cultural issues for further biblical discernment.

Start by framing the issue correctly, then gather the facts, and work through the **Issue, Rule, Analysis, Conclusion, and Policy** yourself.

Remember to consult the Principles for Interpreting the Bible in **Appendix A** and use the Apparent Inconsistency Resolution (AIR) Method when necessary in **Appendix B**.

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Inerrancy, Authority, and Sufficiency of the Bible as God's Word

(Num. 23:19; Deut. 4:2; 29:29; Josh. 1:7–8; Ps. 12:6; 19:7–11; 119:89, 97–105, 160; Prov. 30:5–6; Isa. 40:8; Matt. 4:4–7; 5:17–18; 22:31–32; 24:35; Mark 7:6–13; Luke 24:44–45; John 10:35; 17:17; 1 Cor. 2:12–13; 14:37; Gal. 1:8–12; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; 2 Pet. 1:20–21; 3:15–16; Jude 3; Rev. 22:18–19.)

The New Testament Does Not Override the Old Testament

(Deut. 4:2; Matt. 4:4–10; 5:17–19; 15:3–9; 19:4–6; 22:31–40; Mark 7:18–19; Luke 24:25–27, 44–45; John 10:35; Acts 10:9–16; 15:1–29; Rom. 3:31; 7:12; 13:8–10; 15:4; 1 Cor. 9:8–10; 10:1–11; Gal. 3:23–25; Eph. 6:1–3; Col. 2:16–17; 1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:14–17; Heb. 8:6–13; 10:1; James 2:8–12; 1 Pet. 1:15–16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21.)

Obedying Scripture Over Culture

(Deut. 4:2; Josh. 1:7–8; Judg. 21:25; Ps. 1:1–2; 119:9–11, 104–105, 160; Prov. 3:5–7; 14:12; Isa. 5:20; 8:20; Matt. 4:4; 5:17–19; 7:13–14; 15:3–9; 22:29; John 8:31–32; 10:35; 17:17; Acts 4:18–20; 5:29; 17:10–12; Rom. 1:18–25; 3:4; 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:18–25; 3:18–20; 2 Cor. 10:3–5; Gal. 1:8–10; Eph. 4:14–15; 5:8–11; Phil. 2:14–16; Col. 2:8; 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:21–22; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 4:2–4; James 4:4; 1 Pet. 1:14–16; 4:3–4; 1 John 2:15–17; 4:1.)

Exposing False Teaching

(Matt. 7:15–20; 24:4–5, 11, 24; Acts 17:10–12; 20:28–31; Rom. 16:17–18; 2 Cor. 10:4–5; 11:3–4, 13–15; Gal. 1:6–9; 2:11–14; Eph. 5:11; Col. 2:8; 1 Thess. 5:21–22; 1 Tim. 1:3–7; 4:1–6; 6:3–5; 2 Tim. 2:15–18; 3:13–17; 4:1–5, 14–15; Titus 1:9–14; 3:10–11; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 7–11; 3 John 9–10; 2 Pet. 2:1–3; 3:15–18; Jude 3–4; Rev. 2:2, 14–16, 20.)

The Office of Pastor

(Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Cor. 14:33–37; Eph. 4:11–13; 1 Tim. 2:11–15; 3:1–7; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:24–25; 4:1–5; Titus 1:5–9; Heb. 13:7, 17; James 3:1; 1 Pet. 5:1–4.)

Gender and Biological Sex

(Gen. 1:26–27; 2:18–25; 5:1–2; Deut. 22:5; Job 10:8–11; Ps. 139:13–16; Isa. 44:24; Matt. 19:4–6, 12; Mark 10:6–9; Rom. 1:26–27; 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; 7:2; 11:7–15; Eph. 5:31; Phil. 3:20–21; 1 Tim. 2:13.)

Righteous Judgment

(Ex. 23:1–3, 6–8; Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:16–17; 16:18–20; 1 Sam. 16:7; Prov. 17:15; 18:13, 17; 24:23; 31:8–9; Isa. 5:20; 11:3–4; Zech. 7:9; Matt. 7:1–6, 15–20; Luke 6:37–42; John 7:24; Rom. 2:1–3, 11; 14:1–13; 1 Cor. 2:15; 5:9–13; 6:1–5; 10:15; 11:31; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 5:8–11; Phil. 1:9–10; 1 Thess. 5:21–22; James 2:1–9; 4:11–12; 1 John 4:1.)

Marriage Between One Man and One Woman

(Gen. 1:27–28; 2:18–24; Deut. 17:17; Mal. 2:14–15; Prov. 5:18–19; Matt. 19:4–6; Mark 10:6–9; Rom. 7:2–3; 1 Cor. 6:16; 7:2–5, 10–11; Eph. 5:22–33; Col. 3:18–19; 1 Tim. 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6; Heb. 13:4; 1 Pet. 3:1–7.)

Divorce and Remarriage

(Gen. 2:24; Deut. 24:1–4; Mal. 2:14–16; Matt. 5:31–32; 19:3–12; Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2–3; 1 Cor. 7:10–16, 27–28, 39; Eph. 5:22–33; Heb. 13:4.)

Cohabitation and Premarital Sex

(Gen. 2:24; Ex. 22:16–17; Prov. 5:15–20; Matt. 15:19; 19:4–6; Mark 7:20–23; John 4:16–18; Acts 15:20, 28–29; 1 Cor. 6:9–20; 7:2–5, 8–9; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3–8; Heb. 13:4.)

Sexuality and Sexual Morality

(Gen. 1:27–28; 2:18–24; Ex. 20:14; Lev. 18:6–23; 20:10–21; Prov. 5:15–20; 6:27–35; Matt. 5:27–30; 15:19; 19:4–6; Mark 7:20–23; Acts 15:19–20, 28–29; Rom. 1:24–27; 13:13–14; 1 Cor. 5:1–13; 6:9–20; 7:2–9; Gal. 5:16–24; Eph. 5:3–5; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3–8; 1 Tim. 1:8–11; 2 Tim. 2:22; Heb. 13:4; 1 Pet. 1:14–16; Jude 7.)

Pornography and Lust

(Job 31:1; Ps. 101:3; 119:9–11, 37; Prov. 4:23; 6:25; 7:6–27; Matt. 5:27–30; 15:19; Rom. 13:13–14; 1 Cor. 6:12–20; 10:13; Gal. 5:16–24; Eph. 5:3–12; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3–8; 2 Tim. 2:22; Titus 2:11–12; 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 John 2:15–17.)

Singleness and Celibacy

(Isa. 56:3–5; Jer. 16:1–2; Matt. 19:10–12; 22:30; 1 Cor. 7:6–9, 17–24, 25–40; 1 Tim. 4:1–5; 5:5, 11–14.)

Parenting and Parental Authority

(Gen. 18:19; Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3; Deut. 4:9–10; 6:6–9; 11:18–21; Josh. 24:15; Ps. 78:5–7; Prov. 1:8–9; 6:20–23; 13:24; 19:18; 22:6, 15; 23:13–14, 22–25; 29:15, 17; 30:17; Matt. 18:5–6; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 2:51; Eph. 6:1–4; Col. 3:20–21; 1 Tim. 3:4–5, 12; 5:8; Titus 2:4–5; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14–15; Heb. 12:5–11.)

Education and the Formation of Children

(Deut. 4:9–10; 6:6–9; 11:18–21; Ps. 78:5–7; Prov. 1:7–9; 2:1–11; 4:1–7; 13:20; 22:6, 15; Eccl. 12:1; Matt. 18:5–6; Luke 6:39–40; Acts 17:11; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 10:5; Eph. 6:4; Phil. 4:8; Col. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14–17; Titus 2:1–8.)

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

(Gen. 1:26–27; 9:5–6; Ex. 20:13; Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6; 1 Kings 19:4–18; Job 1:20–22; 14:5; Ps. 31:15; 139:13–16; Eccl. 3:1–2; 8:8; Prov. 24:11–12; 31:8–9; Matt. 25:35–40; Luke 10:30–37; Rom. 14:7–9; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; 2 Cor. 4:16–18; 12:7–10; Phil. 1:20–24; James 5:13–16.)

Alcohol

(Deut. 14:26; Ps. 104:14–15; Prov. 20:1; 23:20–21, 29–35; 31:4–5; Isa. 5:11–12, 22–23; 28:7; Hab. 2:15; Matt. 11:18–19; Luke 7:33–34; 21:34; John 2:1–11; Rom. 13:13–14; 14:13–23; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9–12; 8:9–13; 10:23–33; Gal. 5:19–23; Eph. 5:18; 1 Tim. 3:2–3, 8; 5:23; Titus 1:7; 2:2–3; 1 Pet. 4:3; 5:8.)

Recreational Drugs and Intoxication

(Prov. 20:1; 23:29–35; 31:4–5; Luke 21:34; Rom. 13:13–14; 1 Cor. 6:12, 19–20; 10:23, 31; Gal. 5:19–23; Eph. 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:6–8; 2 Tim. 1:7; Titus 2:11–12; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:3, 7; 5:8.)

War and Military Service

(Gen. 14:14–16; Ex. 20:13; Deut. 20:1–20; Ps. 144:1; Eccl. 3:8; Isa. 2:2–4; Mic. 4:1–4; Matt. 5:9, 38–44; 8:5–13; 26:51–54; Luke 3:14; 14:31; 22:35–38; John 15:13; 18:36; Acts 5:29; 10:1–48; 23:23–24; Rom. 12:17–21; 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:13–14.)

Giving to Beggars and Helping the Poor

(Lev. 25:35; Deut. 15:7–11; Ps. 41:1; Prov. 14:21, 31; 19:17; 21:13; 22:9; 28:27; 31:8–9; Isa. 58:6–7; Matt. 5:42; 6:1–4; 19:21; 25:35–40; Luke 3:10–11; 6:30; 10:30–37; 12:33; 14:12–14; Acts 3:1–10; 11:27–30; 20:35; Rom. 12:13; 2 Cor. 8:13–15; 9:6–8; Gal. 2:10; 6:10; Eph. 4:28; 1 Tim. 5:3–16; 2 Thess. 3:10–12; James 2:15–16; 1 John 3:17–18.)

Honoring Parents as Adults

(Gen. 2:24; Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3; Deut. 5:16; Prov. 1:8–9; 6:20–23; 23:22–25; 30:17; Matt. 10:37; 15:3–6; 19:4–6; Mark 7:9–13; Acts 5:29; Eph. 6:1–3; Col. 3:20; 1 Tim. 5:4, 8, 16.)

Gossip, Slander, and Meddling

(Lev. 19:16; Prov. 11:13; 16:28; 17:9; 18:8; 20:19; 25:9–10; 26:20, 22; Matt. 12:36–37; 18:15–17; Rom. 1:29–30; 2 Cor. 12:20; Eph. 4:25, 29, 31; Col. 3:8; 1 Thess. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:11; 5:13; Titus 2:3; 3:2; James 1:19, 26; 3:5–10; 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:1; 4:15.)

Male and Female Chauvinism

(Gen. 1:26–27; 2:18–24; Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3; Prov. 31:10–31; Matt. 19:4; Acts 2:17–18; Rom. 3:22–23; 12:10; 1 Cor. 7:3–4; 11:3, 8–12; 12:12–27; Gal. 3:26–29; Eph. 5:21–33; Phil. 2:3–4; Col. 3:18–19; 1 Tim. 5:1–2; 1 Pet. 3:7; James 2:1–9.)

Self-Defense and Defense of Others

(Gen. 1:26–27; 9:5–6; 14:14–16; Ex. 22:2–3; Neh. 4:13–18; Esth. 8:11; 9:1–5, 16; Ps. 82:3–4; Prov. 24:11–12; 31:8–9; Matt. 5:38–44; 24:43; 26:51–54; Luke 11:21; 22:35–38, 49–51; John 15:13; 18:10–11; Acts 23:16–24; Rom. 12:17–21; 13:3–4.)

Crime, Punishment, and Criminal Justice

(Ex. 20:13–16; 21:12–25; 22:1–4; 23:1–3, 6–8; Lev. 19:15; Num. 35:9–34; Deut. 1:16–17; 16:18–20; 17:6–7; 19:15–21; 24:16; 25:1–3; Prov. 17:15; 18:13, 17; 24:23–25; 31:8–9; Isa. 1:17; 10:1–2; Eccl. 8:11; Matt. 5:7; 25:35–40; Luke 3:14; 19:8; John 7:24; Acts 25:10–11; Rom. 12:17–21; 13:1–7; 1 Tim. 1:8–10; 1 Pet. 2:13–14.)

Capital Punishment

(Gen. 1:26–27; 9:5–6; Ex. 20:13; 21:12–14; Lev. 24:17; Num. 35:9–34; Deut. 16:18–20; 17:6–7; 19:15–21; Prov. 17:15; 18:17; Eccl. 8:11; Luke 23:39–41; Acts 25:10–11; Rom. 12:17–21; 13:1–4; 1 Pet. 2:13–14.)

Profanity, Vulgarity, and Obscene Speech

(Ex. 20:7; Lev. 19:12; Ps. 19:14; 34:13; Prov. 10:19; 12:18; 15:1, 4; 18:21; 21:23; Matt. 5:22; 12:34–37; Eph. 4:25, 29, 31; 5:3–4; Phil. 2:14; 4:8; Col. 3:8; 4:6; 1 Tim. 6:4; 2 Tim. 2:16, 23–25; Titus 3:2; James 1:19, 26; 3:2–12; 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:1; 3:9–10.)

Entertainment and Media

(Job 31:1; Ps. 1:1–2; 101:3, 6–7; 119:37; Prov. 4:23, 25–27; 13:20; 14:9; 22:24–25; Isa. 5:20; Matt. 5:27–30; 6:22–23; 12:34–37; Rom. 12:2; 13:14; 1 Cor. 6:12; 8:9–13; 10:23–24, 31; 15:33; 2 Cor. 10:5; Eph. 4:29; 5:3–16; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:1–8, 17; 1 Thess. 5:21–22; 1 Tim. 4:4–5; 2 Tim. 3:1–5; Titus 2:11–12; 1 Pet. 1:13–16; 2:11; 1 John 2:15–17.)

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT DISCERNMENT

We began Season 4 with a simple goal: to learn how to distinguish truth from error and good from evil according to God's Word.

The issues Christians face will continue to change. Political movements, technologies, moral standards, and cultural arguments will come and go. But God's Word doesn't change (Isa. 40:8).

The issues we examined—Marxism, "Christian nationalism," abortion, sexuality, marriage, and racism—gave us opportunities to practice discernment. The greater goal is to develop a biblical way of thinking that can be applied to whatever comes next.

The main lessons of this Season can therefore be summarized in six conclusions.

A. KNOW THE WORD

Biblical discernment begins with knowing Scripture. Paul wrote:

(2 Tim. 3:16–17 NASB) "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

Since Scripture is the inspired Word of God, it gives Christians the final standard by which every other moral and spiritual claim must be measured (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16–17).

We can't reliably recognize a counterfeit if we don't know the genuine article.

That's why discernment requires more than knowing a few favorite verses. We need to understand the Bible as a whole. We need to read passages in context, compare Scripture with Scripture, understand sound doctrine, and learn how the different parts of God's Word fit together (Ps. 119:104–105; 2 Tim. 2:15).

This also protects us from allowing the culture to become our standard. Something doesn't become true because an expert says it, because the government promotes it, because a political party supports it, because social media repeats it, or because nearly everyone around us accepts it. Human beings and human institutions can be wrong.

God's Word remains true. The Psalmist wrote:

(Ps. 119:105 KJV) "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

A lamp is useful because it allows us to see what would otherwise remain hidden. In the same way, Scripture gives us light by which we can examine the world around us.

The first requirement for becoming a discerning Christian is therefore simple:

Know the Word.

B. TEST EVERYTHING

Knowing Scripture prepares us for the next responsibility: testing what we encounter. Paul gives perhaps the clearest summary of biblical discernment:

(1 Thess. 5:21–22 NASB) “But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.”

Notice that Paul doesn’t say to believe everything. Neither does he say to reject everything.

He says to “**examine everything carefully.**”

The Bereans provide the practical example. They listened eagerly to Paul but still “examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11 CSB).

John similarly tells Christians not to “believe every spirit” but to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1 NASB).

No human teacher is above that examination.

Pastors should be tested by Scripture. Authors should be tested. Professors, scientists, politicians, commentators, activists, government officials, political parties, and cultural movements should be tested. Even our own long-held beliefs must remain open to correction when God’s Word shows that we are wrong (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21–22).

Testing also requires accurate facts.

As we learned through I.R.A.C.P., the right biblical Rule applied to the wrong facts can still produce the wrong Conclusion. We therefore need to hear before answering, examine evidence, distinguish facts from claims, understand important definitions, and avoid allowing slogans or emotionally loaded labels to decide the issue for us (Prov. 18:13, 17). The I.R.A.C.P. section repeatedly emphasizes this combination of the right biblical Rule and the right facts.

Biblical discernment isn’t cynicism. We aren’t looking for reasons to distrust everyone. We are looking for truth.

So when an idea comes before us, our instinct should increasingly become:

What exactly is being claimed? What are the facts? What does Scripture say? Does this agree with God’s Word?

Test everything.

C. DISCERN GOOD FROM EVIL

Testing has a purpose. Christians are supposed to reach moral judgments. The key verse for this entire Season says:

(Heb. 5:14 CSB) “But solid food is for the mature—for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil.”

Notice that Christian maturity involves learning to “**distinguish between good and evil.**”

That requires us to reject the idea that Christians should never judge whether something is right or wrong. Jesus condemned hypocritical judgment, but He also commanded His followers to “judge with righteous judgment” (Matt. 7:1–5; John 7:24 NASB).

The question isn’t whether we make moral judgments. The question is what standard governs those judgments.

God must define good and evil. Isaiah warned:

(Isa. 5:20 CSB) “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”

That warning is especially important in a culture where moral confusion can be hidden behind changing terminology. A sinful action doesn’t become righteous because it receives a compassionate-sounding name. A righteous belief doesn’t become evil because it receives an offensive-sounding label.

We saw that repeatedly in the cultural issues we examined. Discernment required us to look behind words such as “justice,” “choice,” “identity,” “racism,” and “Christian nationalism” and ask what the underlying belief or action actually was. The cultural examples were therefore applications of the larger method, not the method itself.

At the same time, righteous judgment requires humility. We can misunderstand Scripture. We can misunderstand the facts. We can allow anger, fear, political loyalty, personal experience, or pride to influence our judgment.

That is why mature discernment combines conviction with humility.

Where God has spoken clearly, we should stand clearly. Where the facts are uncertain, we should admit uncertainty.

Where Scripture permits several faithful applications, we shouldn’t pretend our personal judgment carries the authority of God’s Word.

But when God clearly calls something good or evil, Christians shouldn’t allow the culture to reverse His judgment.

Discern good from evil.

D. HOLD FAST TO WHAT IS GOOD

Discernment isn't merely the ability to find something wrong. Paul says:

(Rom. 12:9 CSB) "Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good."

Christians are sometimes better at identifying what we oppose than remembering what we are supposed to embrace.

Biblical discernment requires both.

We reject falsehood because we love truth. We reject injustice because we love justice. We reject sexual immorality because we recognize the goodness of God's design. We reject the taking of innocent life because human life bears God-given dignity. We reject racial partiality because all people bear God's image and belong to one human family. We reject counterfeit gospels because the true gospel of Jesus Christ alone can save (Gen. 1:27; Acts 4:12; 17:26; Rom. 1:16).

This is why the Policy stage of I.R.A.C.P. asks, "**Why is God's way good?**"

God's commands aren't arbitrary restrictions. They come from the God who is Himself good, righteous, holy, loving, and wise. Scripture describes His commandment as "holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12 NASB), and Moses told Israel that God's commands were given for their good (Deut. 10:12–13). The manuscript develops that point as the purpose of the Policy stage: understanding what good God protects and what harm His commands restrain.

That changes the way we approach discernment.

We aren't merely asking, "What am I forbidden to believe or do?"

We are also asking, "What truth should I believe? What good should I pursue? What should I protect? What should I love?"

Paul tells us not only to examine everything but, after examining it, to "**hold fast to that which is good**" (1 Thess. 5:21 NASB).

When something is true, hold onto it.

When something is righteous, practice it.

When God has declared something good, don't surrender it merely because the culture has changed its mind.

Hold fast to what is good.

E. ACT ON WHAT GOD HAS SAID

Discernment has failed if it ends only with reaching the correct answer.

James wrote:

(James 1:22 CSB) “But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

Throughout this study, we have seen that God’s Word must move from **confession to conviction to conduct**.

Once we know what God has said, we must ask what obedience requires.

Sometimes the answer is personal. We may need to repent, forgive someone, resist temptation, change a belief, give generously, correct our speech, or stop participating in something sinful.

At other times, obedience affects the world around us. Christians are called to be salt and light, speak the truth in love, do good, pursue justice, defend people who cannot adequately defend themselves, care for people in need, share the gospel, and faithfully use the opportunities God gives us (Matt. 5:13–16; Eph. 4:15; Prov. 31:8–9; Gal. 6:10).

For Christians living in a constitutional republic, some of those opportunities may also include voting, petitioning government, seeking office, using legal rights, speaking publicly, supporting worthy causes, or otherwise participating lawfully in civic life. And when human authority actually commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands, the controlling principle remains: “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29 NASB). Section III develops precisely this movement from discernment to faithful action while keeping the gospel at the center.

But action itself isn’t enough. Activity can be foolish when it isn’t guided by discernment.

We need both.

Discernment without obedience can become informed disobedience. Action without discernment can become misguided zeal.

And we must always remember that our deepest mission remains the gospel. Better laws can restrain evil, good works can help our neighbors, and faithful cultural engagement can accomplish genuine good. But none of those things can regenerate a sinner.

Only Jesus Christ saves (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:3–4).

Our responsibility is therefore faithfulness. We may not always win the argument, change the law, persuade the other person, or see the result we hoped for. The outcome belongs to God.

Our responsibility is to hear what God has said and faithfully do it.

Act on what God has said.

F. DEFENSE, DOCTRINE & DISCERNMENT

This brings us back to where THE 3D SERIES began.

Season 1: The Authority of Scripture established the foundation. Because “all Scripture is inspired by God,” the Bible gives Christians an unchanging standard for truth and error (2 Tim. 3:16–17 NASB).

Season 2: Practical Evangelism & Apologetics taught us to spread and defend that truth. Jesus commands us to make disciples, and Peter tells us to be ready to defend the hope within us (Matt. 28:19–20; 1 Pet. 3:15).

Season 3: Doctrine taught us sound biblical teaching so that we can recognize and resist error (Titus 1:9; 2:1; 2 Tim. 4:3–4).

Season 4: Discernment has taught us to apply that truth.

Together, the four Seasons form a clear progression: Authority gives us the standard. Doctrine teaches us the truth. Defense prepares us to spread and defend it. Discernment teaches us to apply it.

A Christian must know what he believes, recognize when truth is being challenged, and be willing to live according to what God has revealed. Through all of it, Jesus Christ must remain at the center.

Defense isn’t merely about winning arguments. Doctrine isn’t merely collecting information. Discernment isn’t becoming suspicious or argumentative. The goal is mature discipleship—knowing God’s Word, resisting error, speaking truth with grace, and faithfully obeying Christ (1 Pet. 3:15; Titus 2:1; Heb. 5:14).

The final goal of THE 3D SERIES is therefore not simply Christians who know more facts or win more debates. It is Christians whose minds are renewed by Scripture, whose lives are obedient to Christ, and who can recognize a counterfeit because they know the genuine article (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:14–15; Col. 3:17).

Cultures will continue to change. God’s truth will not.

So know the Word. Test everything. Discern good from evil. Hold fast to what is good. Act on what God has said.

And in all of it, be prepared to defend the faith, hold to sound doctrine, and practice biblical discernment—for the glory of God and in faithful obedience to Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX A: PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

The 3D Series operates on the following basic assumptions regarding the Bible, covered in more detail in **Season 1: The Authority of Scripture**:

- (1) The entire Bible, the Old and New Testaments (but not the Apocrypha), is the actual Word of God written by divinely inspired human writers (2 Tim. 3:16).
- (2) Though there have been minor copy errors and translation variations over the years, the Bible we have today is over 99.5% accurate to the original writings.
- (3) None of the copy errors and translation variations seriously affect any doctrinal issue. Therefore, the translated Bible in your hand is "effectively" or "substantively" inerrant (without error) and infallible (incapable of error). Jesus and the Apostles, for example, still respected OT Scripture as God's actual word, even though they didn't have the original copies.
- (4) Since the Bible is the actual Word of God, it is consistent and it is the truth.
- (5) Any apparent inconsistencies are only apparent on the surface and should be construed in favor of consistency. See **Appendix B: The Apparent Inconsistency Resolution (AIR) Method**.
- (6) "Red letter only" Christianity is biblically unsound. Since God has existed as an eternal Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, "God's Word" involves the entire Trinity. Therefore, anything done by or said by God in the Bible involves Jesus (for example, John 1:1-3).
- (7) Because of the eternal nature of the Trinity, it is not true that God is mean and wrathful in the OT and nice in the NT. God has always been loving, but he is also just and has the supreme right to expect obedience and to punish for disobedience.
- (8) The NT does not replace the OT. Though most of the ceremonial and dietary laws have been fulfilled by Christ and therefore are inapplicable to Christians today, and though the Israelite civil laws were primarily applicable to the nation of Israel, the moral laws underlying all of the OT laws are, for the most part, still applicable to everyone.
- (9) If the Bible covers an issue or can be reasonably construed as covering an issue, what the Bible says about it is final over any other opinion. The Bible is the rock upon which our opinions should break, not the other way around. The Bible should not be conformed to culture (Col. 2:8).
- (10) Avoid cherry-picking verses out of context. Scripture should be interpreted in context and by other Scripture.
- (11) Pray for wisdom to understand Scripture (James 1:5).
- (12) Consider that there are some things we may not be meant to know (Deut. 29:29).

APPENDIX B:

THE APPARENT INCONSISTENCY RESOLUTION (AIR) METHOD

What follows is a method a Christian can use to understand difficult passages in the Bible that **seem** to be inconsistent.

The "**apparent inconsistency method**" consists of the following basic steps:

- (1) **Pray for wisdom to understand the passages** (James 1:5 KJV: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.");
- (2) **Always assume that the Bible is consistent and true and therefore there is a right answer, even if you cannot figure it out** (2 Tim. 3:16 CSB: "All Scripture is inspired by God"; John 17:17 KJV: "Thy word is truth");
- (3) **Consider that "all Scripture is inspired by" the eternal Trinity** (for example, Gen. 1:26; Matt. 28:18-20; John 1:1-3, 14). Therefore, (a) Jesus always spoke on behalf of the Triune God as a Person of the Triune God and therefore did not contradict what God has said before Jesus was physically born of Mary, (b) everything God has ever done in the OT and NT involved Jesus (John 1:1-3, 14), and (c) the red-letter-only philosophy contradicts Jesus' own opinion of Scripture (e.g., John 10:35b);
- (4) **Do not subject the Bible to your own judgment but rather submit to the Bible** (Col. 2:8 KJV: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.");
- (5) **Consider we may not be meant to know** (Deut. 29:29 KJV: "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of his law.");
- (6) **Consider what other faithful teachers have said about it and study the issue more** (Prov. 11:14 KJV: "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety"; Josh. 1:8 CSB: "meditate on it [the word] day and night"); and
- (7) **Interpret Scripture with Scripture** since all Scripture is consistent, but do not take passages out of context.

APPENDIX C: THE I.R.A.C.P. METHOD

The I.R.A.C.P. Method is a simple way to apply biblical discernment to an issue. It is adapted from a method used in legal reasoning and should be used together with the biblical interpretation principles in **Appendix A** and, when necessary, the Apparent Inconsistency Resolution (AIR) Method in **Appendix B**.

I — ISSUE: What is the issue?

Clearly state the question. Define important terms and distinguish moral questions from factual or policy questions.

R — RULE: What does the Bible say?

Identify the direct commands, biblical principles, and doctrines that govern the issue. Interpret Scripture in context and with Scripture according to Appendix A. If relevant passages appear inconsistent, use the AIR Method in Appendix B.

A — ANALYSIS: How does Scripture apply?

Determine the relevant facts and apply all applicable biblical Rules to them. When multiple passages or principles must be brought together, use Appendices A and B as necessary.

Distinguish facts from claims or assumptions, and consider whether your own preferences or biases are affecting your reasoning.

C — CONCLUSION: What should we conclude?

Reach only the conclusion supported by Scripture and the facts. Be clear where Scripture is clear and appropriately cautious where facts or applications are uncertain.

P — POLICY: Why is God's way good?

Consider what good God's way protects, what harm it restrains, and what it reveals about His character, wisdom, and design.

I.R.A.C.P. should lead to obedience, not merely a conclusion. Once we know what God has said, we should faithfully act upon it (James 1:22; James 4:17; Matt. 7:24; Col. 3:17).

