



Biblical Responses to Secular Beliefs

(9) Cultural Marxism

Psalm 19:7-11

Micah 6:6-8

Matthew 5:10-12

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This is sermon #9 in the series called “Biblical Responses to Secular Beliefs” and our topic this morning is “Cultural Marxism.” I was first alerted to cultural Marxism through listening to Jordan Peterson. I thought that I should learn a little more about it from a Christian perspective and so I have done some reading in this area. That does not make me an expert, but I know enough to know that this is an important subject for Christians and that it is something that we should all know a little bit about because it explains a great deal of what is going on in our society and because like all the ideas that we have considered in this series, it is influencing many in the church in ways that are contrary to the Bible. Cultural Marxism is antichristian at its very heart and yet because of the ways that we are all influenced by what people around us think, many Christians imbibe the ideas of cultural Marxism to the harm of their souls – sometimes to the shipwreck of their souls.

Now cultural Marxism is the source for many ideas and terms that are familiar even if the term cultural Marxism is not. The victim mentality that is so prevalent in our culture is rooted in cultural Marxism, especially the idea that whole classes of people are victims. The language of oppression is an important part of the vocabulary of this way of looking at the world. So is much of the language of equality. The idea of white privilege comes from cultural Marxism and so does the idea that the Christian moral teaching concerning sex and gender is

harmful and oppressive. So you can see that an awful lot of what is going on in our society is connected in some way to cultural Marxism and in particular the aggressive way in which progressives today push their agenda and are disdainful of religious freedom are very much rooted in the philosophy of cultural Marxism.

Now cultural Marxism is not the same thing as classical Marxism although the two are historically related. It will help for me to give just very brief summary of classical Marxism for a better understanding of the cultural Marxism that we are facing today in the west. Classical Marxism is about the inequities between the rich and the poor. It is about the oppression and the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Marx taught a philosophy of history in which it was inevitable that the poor would rise up and overthrow the rich and the result would be a classless society in which everyone shared equally in the resources of the earth. In Marxism, societies are divided by the oppressors and the oppressed. People are not seen as individuals, but as members of their class and they are virtuous or villainous depending of the class to which they belong. Those who are in power use their power to oppress the masses. And religion is considered part of the way that the powerful maintain their control over the powerless. That is what is behind the phrase that religion is the opium of the people.

Those are some of the main ideas of classical Marxism. While Marx was responding to real grievances in that the rich have almost always treated the poor badly, the solution was worse than the problem as is obvious from the great horrors and injustices that have been perpetuated whenever communism was tried as a political system. The same is the case with cultural Marxism to some extent. There are clearly injustices in the world. Cultural Marxism is a response to both real injustices and perceived injustices. But the analysis of what constitutes an injustice and the prescription for dealing with what it perceives to be injustices are rooted in an atheistic worldview and so are often destructive and evil from a biblical perspective.

Cultural Marxism developed from the failures of communism. There were a number of thinkers during the mid to late 20th century and beyond who appreciated many of Marx's ideas, but saw that the

communist application of them had not been successful. And so they continued to build on Marx's foundation, but moved beyond simply economic concerns, and focused on all kinds of inequities and perceived injustices in western societies. Cultural Marxism is very concerned with inequities and injustices in the west, but in further developing some of Marx's ideas, it sees inequities everywhere and it is committed to breaking down these inequities, not now through violent means like communism did, but through changing the thinking of the people of a society so that in the end the power is held by the enlightened class who impose their ideas of equality on all the rest. The principle means that they have used and are using to conform society into their own image are the media, education and politics. While it is not a violent takeover that they envision, a takeover is their goal and what we are seeing in our own time shows us how successful they have been and continue to be. Cultural Marxism is not the only explanation for what is going on in our society. There are many themes and sources and perspectives. But it is one of them.

The great issue of cultural Marxism is the issue of who controls society. As they see it, the people who now control society are the people with power and privilege and they use their power and privilege for their own advantages and for the disadvantage of the others. This is known as cultural hegemony. Here is a definition from a recent article by Nicki Lisa Cole, "Cultural hegemony refers to domination or rule maintained through ideological or cultural means. It is usually achieved through social institutions, which allow those in power to strongly influence the values, norms, ideas, expectations, worldview, and behavior of the rest of society. Cultural hegemony functions by framing the worldview of the ruling class, and the social and economic structures that embody it, as just, legitimate, and designed for the benefit of all, even though these structures may only benefit the ruling class."

So cultural Marxism sees society through this lens. And it is not just about politics although politics is involved. So, for instance, white people in our society have cultural hegemony which means that white people frame ideas in such a way that their own privileges are protected and males, for instance, use their cultural hegemony to promote ideas

that help maintain their privileges and straight people have cultural hegemony and therefore promote the normalness and morality of heterosexuality to maintain their privilege and so on. So, the people with the most power and influence are white heterosexual males and everyone who is not a white heterosexual male is oppressed in some way by the cultural hegemony of white heterosexual males.

Now the balance here is obviously changing, but this is what is going on. Cultural Marxism is about gaining cultural hegemony with the goal of eliminating all of the engrained injustices that are embedded in the structures and thoughts of society and achieve an equality according to their understanding of justice and equality. So, it is about a takeover of society, no less than classical Marxism was about taking over society, but cultural Marxism takes a longer view and seeks to gain control through propaganda which is disseminated through the educational system, through entertainment and the media and through political influence.

Another important concept of cultural Marxism is the practice of thinking of people largely in terms of the group to which they belong in connection with power and oppression. So, if you are a white heterosexual male, you are an oppressor. If you are a white heterosexual female you are oppressed because you are a female, but not as much as other females because you are white and heterosexual. But if you are a black, lesbian you are triple oppressed because you are black, because you are a female and because you are a homosexual. This idea is called intersectionality. Intersectionality has to do the degree of oppression being compounded because you belong to a number of categories of people who are oppressed in society.

Because of these ideas Christianity is considered to be oppressive, particularly of females and anyone who does not embrace the Christian sexual ethic. The idea of male headship in the home and church is considered to be oppressive of woman and the idea of the only right place for sexual activity as in a marriage between a man and a woman is considered to be oppressive to anyone who does not share the Christian ethic of sex. By means of these ideas Christians are considered to be seeking to control the lives of other people and that is seen to be

oppression. And oppression is bad. Oppression harms other people and so those influenced by cultural Marxist ideas use the language of bigotry and hate to refer to Christians who abide by Biblical teaching and increasingly the law is being used to stop the things that cultural Marxists consider to be oppressive.

We will get to the Biblical response in a moment but let me say at this point that God and the Bible are concerned about true injustices in the world. To be critical of cultural Marxism is not to say that there are no problems in the world related to things like racism and exploitation and oppression. Some of the things that cultural Marxism addresses are real problems from a biblical perspective, but because of the vast difference between the Biblical worldview and the cultural Marxist worldview, there are great differences in both the analysis of the problems and the just and realistic way to deal with them.

One of the characteristics with cultural Marxism which it shares with classical Marxism is that it is a utopian vision of society and utopian visions of society are dangerous because they require force to bring those who do not accept the utopian vision into line. So, the utopian vision of cultural Marxism is equality according to its understanding of equality. Equality between whites and everyone else. Equality between males and females. Equality between people with different sexual orientations. Equality between people of different gender preferences. But the dangerous part is that it is willing to use force to enforce its vision of equality. That is becoming more and more clear as the law and the justice system are increasingly being used to enforce the cultural Marxist view of an equal society. It is a utopian vision and utopian visions are dangerous because of the willingness to use force to bring into line those who do not share the utopian vision.

But force is not the only strategy. Force only is possible once you have the power and the cultural Marxist promoters have been using all kinds of other means to gain power and influence in our society. They have been very active in using education and entertainment and the rest of the media as well as political activity and the justice system to change the way people look at things to bring the masses in line with cultural Marxist ideology.

One of the tactics that has been very successful is the tactic of political correctness. There are certain things that you are not allowed to say or even think and those who do are shamed with labels such as bigot or fascist or homophobic. This is their way of shutting down debate and discussion. Views that are not in line with the cultural Marxist agenda are considered to be so obviously prejudiced and hateful that they must not be allowed even to be heard. This is a reflection of the totalitarian mentality of cultural Marxism. It is not a promoter of the free expression of viewpoints and debate about matters of truth. It is about the suppression of rival viewpoints and perspectives. Anything that does not conform to cultural Marxist orthodoxy must not be heard. It is considered dangerous and hateful and it must be silenced by shouting or shaming or by legislation. This is behind the often violent protests on university campuses that attempt to silence speakers with views that do not pass the test of political correctness.

Now this is disturbing stuff from a Christian perspective. It is disturbing not only because it is possible to trace what is happening in our society back to a cultural Marxist agenda and not only because it is a deliberately implemented agenda to gain control of society that has been in the works for decades, it is also disturbing because it is clear that an awful lot of the agenda has been accomplished and because it is fundamentally and rabidly anti-Christian. It does not take a prophet to see that if trends continue as they have been developing, it is going to be more difficult for Christians in our society. We all see that. We all know that.

The trends may not continue. God may do something in history that will result in a different direction and different trends. But one is not being alarmist to believe that cultural Marxism will make it increasingly difficult for Christians in the west if current trends continue.

So, the first thing that I want to say as part of the biblical response to cultural Marxism is that we should not live in fear and dread of difficulties that we may experience in the future. According to the Bible, persecution is the norm for Christians, but according to the same Bible, Christians can and should live their lives with hope and joy and a generally positive attitude. A great deal of background to the New

Testament is persecution, but the mood of the New Testament is upbeat and positive because of the victory that Jesus has won and will completely implement when he returns and because believers are on the right side of history no matter what is going on because Jesus is the Lord of history and because there is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ.

Joy and hope are two important New Testament words. Near the end of his letter to the Romans Paul wrote, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” The New Testament is very realistic about the reality of suffering in this life, but it insists that “the sufferings of this present time are not with comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). Jesus in Matthew 5:10-12 says that those who are reviled and persecuted for his sake are blessed and in the light of that he tells us “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven....”

This is a vital biblical perspective for us. We must be realistic about cultural Marxism and how much power and influence it has in our society and how the seeds of persecution are in it. That realism is required by the biblical teaching about persecution and by observing what is going on in our society. But true Christianity is about hope and joy in our salvation. It calls us to trust in the power and sovereignty of God, in Jesus Christ who sits on the throne, and in the certain ultimate victory for the kingdom of God. We must be more concerned about worldliness and being too tied to the things of this earth than about the fact we are living in a society which is increasingly hostile to Christianity and the followers of Jesus. Near the end of the book of Hebrews we are instructed, “Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So, we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’”

The greatest danger from cultural Marxism is not the persecution that inherent in it, but its influence and the possibility of it leading us astray. Hear again a verse that I have quoted a number of times in this series. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “... I am afraid that as

the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” This is where the great danger lies from cultural Marxism. The thing that we must be most concerned about is not what suffering we may have to endure but being led astray from devotion to Christ. It will be hard if we have to suffer. And that is never trivial. But if we are led astray from Christ, that would be the ultimate disaster. Jesus told us in Mathew 10:28, “[D]o not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Now in thinking through cultural Marxism from a biblical perspective, it must be said first of all that a concern with justice and oppression and the suffering of the weak and vulnerable is a good thing. It is a biblical concern. Think of that important verse in Micah, Micah 6:8, where Micah says, “He has told you, O man, what is good, and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” Think also of what Jesus said to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:23, ²³“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”

As Christians we should care about matters of injustice and oppression. We should care about racism. We should care about unjust structures in society. We should care about poverty. We should care about any way that people are mistreated. We to be people who love. We are to be people of compassion. We are to have a heart for the weak and the powerless and downtrodden.

Now these are complex matters. Caring about issues of injustice and oppression does not mean agreeing with cultural Marxism about who is oppressed or how real issues of oppression and injustice should be dealt with. Christians are involved in these areas and we are involved in these areas through anything that we do to help the poor and change society for the better. Word and Deed helps a lot of people who suffer because of oppression. ARPA and Cardus and similar organizations are engaged in promoting justice and helping the weak from a Christian perspective. Christians must care about these things and cultural Marxism is a

reminder to us that it is at the heart of the Christian life to love and to care and to seek the well-being for all. We should not allow the fact that cultural Marxism gets it wrong in so many areas to turn us away from issues of justice and oppression altogether. These are biblical concerns.

But the Bible and cultural Marxism are different worldviews and so there are profound differences concerning what true wellbeing is and what is harmful and destructive. Cultural Marxism considers the biblical teaching on marriage and sexuality to be oppressive. The Bible teaches that it is the way of health, freedom and wellbeing. The same is true for the authority structure in the home and in church, the God-givenness of gender, evangelism as an expression of love and the biblical critique of the entitlement mentality that is so much a part of cultural Marxism. Justice and fairness that is rooted in the Bible looks different from justice and fairness in the perspective of cultural Marxism, but we do have to be sure to actively care about such matters.

Another key area of biblical concern that addresses cultural Marxism is in the area of sin and personal responsibility. In cultural Marxist terms you are judged by the group or category to which you belong. If you are in a privileged group, you are an oppressor and if you are in a group that is considered to be oppressed, you are oppressed. There are some aspects to cultural Marxist analysis that are clearly true. People of colour often face barriers that white people do not. But that does not mean that all people of color are victims to all white people. That does not mean that all white people are racist and that all people of color have no personal responsibility to try to get ahead in spite of the obstacles they face. It is proper that systemic injustices are removed as much as possible, but people also have a responsibility to try to overcome barriers and do the best that they can in an imperfect world.

I watched a lecture on cultural Marxism by Voddie Baucham, who is a black Christian man. I will pass along the link through the email list. He has experienced the difficulties that many black people face. He was raised by a single mom in a poor part of LA. He knows that racism is real. And it is evil. But one of his critiques of cultural Marxism is that it deals with victims of racism only as victims and puts all the blame on society. What cultural Marxism does not have room for is dealing with

sin and brokenness in subcultures that face real injustices. Anyone who points to the problems caused by sin is accused of blaming the victim. It is always the system's fault. Voddie Baucham says it is not either/or. There are systemic problems that make it difficult for people to get ahead. But there is also sin and sinful choices that are part of the picture and if those are not addressed along with the gospel, people are locked into their hopelessness and misery.

When the Bible calls us to seek justice for all, it means that we should be willing to see that there are injustices that are built into the structures of society and that these are huge and complicated issues. That is why there is an important place for Christians to be involved in think tanks and politics that address some of these big issues and we should support them or be involved more directly. But the Bible's focus is on salvation from sin and that begins with individual responsibility. There is no doubt that some people have it more difficult than others and that matters, and, in the end, human beings are not going to solve these issues although seeking for change is important and necessary.

But we are all sinners and the biblical hope lies in recognizing our own sin, repenting of it and turning to Jesus. The Jews were an oppressed minority in the time of Jesus and the early church, but the gospel message for them was not that they should overthrow the Romans, but that they should be reconciled with God through Jesus Christ. When Peter addressed the Jews on the day of Pentecost this was his message to them. Acts 2:38, "³⁸And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The greatest oppression that human beings experience is the oppression of their own sin and the tyranny of the devil. Jesus came to set us free from that and as Jesus himself said in John 8:36. "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

And one of the things that that freedom means is that we will love and care for others. We will be part of the solution in society rather than part of the problem. We will learn to do our part in treating other people as they ought to be treated. And we will model that especially in the love and unity of the church. In the church we are to demonstrate

to the world, the power of the gospel to change lives and to create a community in which people are encouraged and nurtured rather than oppressed. The church is not a perfect society – we still struggle with sin – but the church is what God is doing in the world through the gospel and it is the sign in the world pointing towards the perfectly just society that God is working towards.

And that is the hope of the world. Cultural Marxism raises the issue of justice and oppression. But since it is not based on the Bible it is ultimately oppressive itself. The hope for the world is not any human agenda or movement, but the plan of God which is to bring the kingdom of God and God is working out that plan through the gospel and through the church. May that be our hope and our confidence even as we live in a world that is hostile to it.