



Sufficiency of Scripture Series

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Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary (MABTS) leadership was frequently approached during 2019 by concerned students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends regarding current trends. Their questions were about debates, decisions, terms, and biblical interpretations currently ongoing within American churches and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The following document (1 of 4) is part of the MABTS Sufficiency of Scripture Series. The series is written and released by MABTS to provide clarity and a broader perspective to the Mid-America family regarding many of the key debates. Each document is intentionally condensed and is not meant to be an exhaustive resource. Included in each issue are references which will aid further study.

The goal of the series is threefold: Challenge Christians to utilize the Scriptures as their guide in any debate, encourage trust in God's Word for all areas of faith and practice, and strengthen the faith of the Mid-America family.

The four focus areas in the MABTS Sufficiency of Scripture Series are:

- (1) Understanding the key debates
- (2) Deepening knowledge of alternate views
- (3) Forming a biblically based opinion
- (4) Using Baptist distinctives to prepare believers for present and future debates
(September 2020)

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Since its founding in 1972, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary (MABTS) has been funded through the generous donations of like-minded believers. The seminary provides master and doctoral level theological training for effective service in church-related and missions vocations. Founded in 2018, The College at Mid-America is the undergraduate school of MABTS and provides associate and baccalaureate degree programs to prepare students to take their place as effective Christian and secular leaders. Both academic institutions guide students into a thorough understanding of the Bible and its relevance to everyday living. Mid-America students volunteer to evangelize and serve the community through the Witness One:Seven and GO! programs. Mid-America is located on an award-winning, 35-acre campus in Memphis, TN. For more information visit www.mabts.edu.



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Understanding the Debate: An Examination of Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Resolution 9 of the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention

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Abstract: Currently the topics of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality are subjects of great interest in Southern Baptist circles. The Southern Baptist Convention passed Resolution 9 (“On Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality”) at the 2019 meeting in Birmingham, Alabama. Proponents and critics have debated whether or not Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality are analytical tools that can help Southern Baptists to address issues related to race, ethnicity, culture, and gender. The purpose of this paper is to inform Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary’s students, staff, faculty, and friends by helping to define Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, to consider benefits and risks related to Southern Baptists utilizing these ideologies as tools, to provide some helpful resources for readers who wish to research the subjects further, and to emphasize Southern Baptists’ commitment to Scripture as the inspired, inerrant, and completely sufficient Word of God.

Introduction

In recent years, Southern Baptists have had many discussions regarding the issues of race, ethnicity, culture, and gender. At the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in Birmingham, Alabama, delegates affirmed Resolution 9 (“On Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality”).¹ The passing of this resolution generated much debate as proponents argued for the merits of their position, and critics pointed out what they see to be the fallacies of embracing these ideologies as analytical tools.

Proponents of Resolution 9 believe Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality, when used in conjunction with the Bible, can help to address societal problems such as racism. Critics of Resolution 9 maintain that Scripture alone is sufficient to address these problems, and the manner in

¹ For the content of this resolution, see “On Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality,” Southern Baptist Convention, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2308/resolution-9--on-critical-race-theory-and-intersectionality>.

which the SBC Resolutions Committee presented Resolution 9 to the messengers of the convention was misleading.² It is important for Christians to debate the usefulness of Resolution 9 and to consider its merit. In order to understand this topic, Christians must understand the nuances and implications of CRT and Intersectionality and evaluate them by Scripture's teachings.

The goal of this paper is to introduce the topics of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality. A paper of seven pages in length will not consider every nuance related to these ideologies, but will focus on the major themes that provide the foundation for these concepts. This paper will 1) define the terms *critical race theory* and *intersectionality* by exploring the beliefs and writings of the scholars who developed these philosophies; 2) consider the benefits and risks of Southern Baptists as they debate these topics; and 3) provide Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary's students, staff, faculty, and friends with relevant information to help them understand the current debate.

The Benefits of Debates Regarding Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality

Southern Baptists should encourage debate regarding current topics of interest. All too often, people make statements and adopt positions without realizing the implications of their beliefs. Southern Baptists would do well to understand the tenets of CRT and Intersectionality as well as the philosophies from which these theories sprouted. For these reasons, this paper provides relevant information that fairly analyzes CRT and Intersectionality using proponents' own words whenever possible to describe their positions. Only when we understand philosophies and movements well can we make informed judgments regarding their value.

Discussions related to debating CRT and Intersectionality can be beneficial so long as Southern Baptists follow four critical guidelines: 1) scrutinize these theories according to scriptural teachings; 2) focus on the primacy of the gospel, evangelism, and discipleship by relying on the sufficiency of Scripture; 3) seek to unify all Southern Baptists under the authority of Scripture; and 4) search Scripture for principles that help to facilitate racial reconciliation and apply these principles to our lives. The following section serves two purposes: 1) to define important terms relevant to this debate; and 2) to bring clarity to this debate within Southern Baptist circles by discussing pertinent issues.

Critical Race Theory: Richard Delgado, one of the originators of the CRT, and his wife Jean Stefancic are professors at the University of Alabama School of Law. They provided a helpful definition of CRT in their seminal work on the subject:

The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, and emotions and the unconscious. Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stress incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very

² E.g., Albert Mohler, "Ideas Have Consequences: Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality in the News from the Southern Baptist Convention," June 14, 2019, <https://albertmohler.com/2019/06/14/briefing-6-14-19>. Mohler wrote concerning Resolution 9, "[W]hen the resolution stated that critical race theory and intersectionality have been appropriated by individuals with worldviews that are contrary to the Christian faith, the reality is that both intersectionality and critical race theory emerged from worldviews, and from thinkers who were directly contrary to the Christian faith."

foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.³

While earlier generations of scholars considered race to be a function of biology, CRT describes race as deriving from one's ethnic and cultural background as well as from socially constructed definitions that undergo periodic change.⁴ For example, the United States Census once included the racial categories *mulatto* (one-half African American), *quadroon* (one-quarter African American), and *octoroon* (one-eighth African American). Beginning in 1900, each of these racial classifications disappeared leaving only the category of Black to describe all of these distinct groups.⁵

In the United States, CRT teaches that racism is not only an individual problem but also an institutionalized problem. CRT argues that racism's purpose is to maintain white privilege, power, and control.⁶ The goal of CRT is to "decloak" what advocates call "color-blind interpretations of the law"⁷ by means of political activism, with the hope of facilitating equality and racial justice.⁸

According to Delgado and Stefancic, most versions of CRT accept the following tenets: 1) racism is ordinary rather than an aberration; 2) "White-over-color ascendancy," which commonly means White people benefiting by disadvantaging people of color; 3) the notion of race is a social construct defined by the dominant racial group; 4) the dominant racial group racializes other people groups in numerous ways based on what will provide the maximum benefit at any given time; 5) minority status provides its bearers with an automatic expertise in matters of race.⁹ In recent years, CRT has produced a variety of subdisciplines: "Asian American jurisprudence, a forceful Latino-critical (LatCrit) contingent, a feisty LGBT interest group, and now a Muslim and Arab caucus."¹⁰

CRT originated in the 1970s in the realm of legal studies because proponents believed the gains of the Civil Rights Movement "had stalled . . . [and] in fact, were being rolled back."¹¹ In addition to its roots in the Critical Legal Studies Movements (CLS),¹² Critical Race theorists also "attempt[ed] to integrate their experiential knowledge into moral and situational analysis of the law."¹³ Founding

³ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 3.

⁴ Narda Razack and Donna Jeffery, "Critical Race Discourse and Tenets for Social Work," *Canadian Social Work Review* 19, no. 2 (2002): 259; Linda M. Burton, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Victor Ray, Rose Buckelew, and Elizabeth Hordge Freeman, "Critical Race Theories, Colorism, and the Decade's Research on Families of Color," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 3 (June 2010): 444.

⁵ Richard Lewis Jr. and Joanne Ford-Robertson, "Understanding the Occurrence of Interracial Marriage in the United States Through Differential Assimilation," *Journal of Black Studies* 41, no. 2 (November 2010): 412.

⁶ Adrien Wing, "Is There a Future for Critical Race Theory?" *Journal of Legal Education* 66, no. 1 (Autumn 2016): 48.

⁷ Laurence Parker, "Critical Race Theory in Education: Possibilities and Problems," *Counterpoints* 168 (2003): 185.

⁸ William F. Tate IV, "Critical Race Theory and Education: History, Theory, and Implications," *Review of Research in Education* 22 (1997): 211.

⁹ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 8-11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, "Critical Race Theory: An Annotated Bibliography," *Virginia Law Review* 79, no. 2 (March 1993): 461.

¹² Natsu Taylor Saito, "Critical Race Theory as International Human Rights Law," *American Society of International Law* 93 (March 1999): 228.

¹³ Tate, "Critical Race Theory and Education," 210.

voices include Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Lani Guinier, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, and Kimberle Crenshaw.¹⁴

Most scholars trace the foundational beliefs of the movement to twentieth century sources: humanist political philosopher Frantz Fanon and W. E. B. Du Bois who were “sympathetic to Marxist theory.”¹⁵ As a result, CRT echoes Marxism’s core belief that “capitalism exploits workers and promotes inequality,”¹⁶ and applies Marxist teachings to the topic of race. Derrick Bell, one of the most influential champions of CRT, wrote, “[C]ould the capitalist class structure maintain itself without the scapegoat role that blacks have filled for three hundred years?”¹⁷ James R. Hackney, professor of law at Northeastern University School of Law, noted that Du Bois’s description of Marxism underpinned Bell’s understanding of the oppression of African Americans in the United States.¹⁸ The resolutions committee of the SBC believed CRT would provide Southern Baptists with tools that could “aid in evaluating a variety of human experiences,” and help to address “social ills” that plague society.¹⁹

Intersectionality: This concept developed from CRT and gender studies.²⁰ Ahir Gopaldas, an assistant professor of marketing at Fordham University in New York, provided a helpful definition: “The concept of ‘intersectionality’ refers to the interactivity of social identity structures such as race, class, and gender in fostering life experiences, especially experiences of privilege and oppression.”²¹ Proponents use this theory as the primary research paradigm through which they examine interactions between people from different backgrounds.²²

In essence, intersectionality teaches that one’s identity is more fragmented than mere ethnic heritage would suggest. According to Avtar Brah, recently retired sociology professor at the University of London, and Ann Phoenix, professor of psychosocial studies at the University College of London, these nuanced distinctions include “economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective, and experiential” differences, and how they intersect.²³ The categories of “race, ethnicity, class, gender, nationality, ability, and religion”²⁴ also are significant to intersectionality.

¹⁴ Edward Taylor, “A Primer on Critical Race Theory,” *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 19 (Spring 1998): 122.

¹⁵ Charles W. Mills, “Critical Race Theory: A Reply to Mike Cole,” *Ethnicities* 9, no. 2 (June 2009): 271. See also Mike Cole, “Critical Race Theory Comes to the UK: A Marxist Response,” *Ethnicities* 9, no. 2 (June 2009): 247; John Shuford, “Four Du Boisian Contributions to Critical Race Theory,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 301-2.

¹⁶ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 179.

¹⁷ Derrick Bell, *Race, Racism, and American Law*, 6th ed. (Chicago: Aspen Publishers, 2008), Location 1908, Kindle.

¹⁸ James R. Hackney, Jr., “Derrick Bell’s Re-Sounding: W. E. Du Bois, Modernism, and Critical Race Scholarship,” *Law & Social Inquiry*, 23, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 143. .

¹⁹ “On Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality,” Southern Baptist Convention, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2308/resolution-9--on-critical-race-theory-and-intersectionality>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7; Helma Lutz, “Intersectionality as Method,” *Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 2, nos. 1-2 (2015): 39.

²¹ Ahir Gopaldas, “Intersectionality 101,” *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 32 (2013): 90.

²² Rita Kaur Dhamoon, “Considerations on Mainstreaming Intersectionality,” *Political Research Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (March 2011): 23.

²³ Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix, “Ain’t I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 5, no. 3 (May 2004): 76.

²⁴ Burton et al., “Critical Race Theories,” 446.

Proponents argue, for example, that the experiences and challenges of White heterosexual women are not the same as African American lesbians, who face different discriminations and disadvantages although both are females. They theorize White heterosexual women might earn lower wages than White heterosexual men for performing the same tasks. On the other hand, African American lesbians might earn lower wages because of their gender, experience stereotyping because of their color, and face further discrimination because of their sexual preferences.

In 1989, Kimberle Crenshaw, an early proponent of CRT, sparked the intersectionality movement when she published the article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination, Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.”²⁵ Devon Carbado, Professor of Law at the UCLA School of Law, outlined the movement’s influence: “Drawing specifically on Black feminist criticism, Crenshaw introduced what would become an enormously influential theory . . . [that] has traveled to and built bridges across a significant number of disciplines.”²⁶ In current iterations, intersectionality no longer pertains exclusively to “women of color,” but has become “an important tool for social analysis”²⁷ in an increasingly greater number of disciplines, such as education, the labor market, power reclamation for disenfranchised groups, and “liberating trans persons from the tyranny of gender normativity and the gender binary.”²⁸ The resolutions committee of the SBC believed Intersectionality would help Southern Baptists to understand “ethnic, gender, and cultural distinctions exist.”²⁹

Risks Related to Debating Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality

Southern Baptists believe that Scripture is perfect because its ultimate author is God. The Baptist Faith and Message of 2000 states,

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.³⁰

²⁵ Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination, Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989): 139-67.

²⁶ Devon W. Carbado, “Colorblind Intersectionality,” *Signs* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2013): 811.

²⁷ Rachel Allison and Pallavi Banerjee, “Intersectionality and Social Location in Organization Studies, 1990-2009,” *Race, Gender & Class* 21, no. 3-4 (2014): 68.

²⁸ Sumi Cho, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis,” *Signs* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2013): 803..

²⁹ “On Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality,” Southern Baptist Convention, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2308/resolution-9--on-critical-race-theory-and-intersectionality>.

³⁰ “The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message, Article One: The Scriptures,” Southern Baptist Convention, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>.

Since Scripture is the standard for both faith *and* practice (i.e., it is inerrant and sufficient), the Bible must be the ultimate standard by which Christians judge every philosophy and movement, including the philosophies that underpin CRT and Intersectionality.

At least three potential risks exist as Southern Baptists debate CRT and Intersectionality. First, it is possible to become so invested in the pros and cons of a debate that people lose sight of the main issue at hand: Christians are to love God, love others, evangelize the lost, and disciple believers (cf. Matt. 22:36-40; 28:18-20). At times, so much energy can be expended by debating an ideology that Christians neglect their God-given responsibilities and fail to seek answers to their problems in the Bible.

Second, Christians must not forget in the midst of their debates that Scripture is sufficient for all the needs of believers. Scripture drives believers back to itself as the only source of belief. Christians would do well to prioritize Scripture over secular sources. In particular, Scripture addresses the oneness of Christians extensively and also provides solutions for breaking down walls of hostility that exist between different people groups (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:1-31, esp. vv. 12-13). Scripture contains a wealth of resources that Christians should not ignore as they consider the merits of different analytical approaches to societal problems.

Third, Christians must be careful not to divide or align over contemporary approaches to societal problems. Racism and racial conflicts exist, and, whenever these problems exist among Christians, the heart of the matter is their failure to realize that people from every culture and ethnicity are loved equally by God. Specifically, Christians are one in Christ and should live as brothers and sisters (Gal. 3:28). Christians have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, and one source of Truth (Eph. 4:5). People who support the sufficiency of Scripture believe racism is wrong in any part of the world or among any people group. The Bible provides solutions for eradicating it without requesting external input or requiring the use of other ideologies (e.g., Acts 10:9-29; 1 Cor. 12:12-31). May these unifiers prompt Southern Baptists to live in harmony with each other for God's glory as we share with the world the hope we have in Christ.

Conclusion

The Bible says much about racial reconciliation because conflicts between people of different ethnicities are an appalling result of mankind's sinful nature. In the first century, Christians sometimes had difficulty understanding they were one in Christ. They learned from New Testament writers, who echoed the message of the Old Testament, that God desires all peoples to worship Him together as brothers and sisters (e.g., Ps. 22:27-28; Col. 3:10-11; Rev. 7:9-11). Christians sometimes have failed to embrace this unity by misapplying Scripture and by mistreating people from differing ethnic backgrounds. Whenever these tragedies have occurred, God's Word has not been at fault. Rather, the absence of reconciliation between believers and a lack of Christian influence on society comes from a failure to use God's Word correctly to break down the walls of hostility that separate believers and impair their influence on culture (cf. Eph. 2:13-15).

In previous decades, Southern Baptists debated the inspiration of Scripture and determined that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:24-25). The Baptist Faith and Message of 2000 affirms this important doctrine. Current debates in Southern Baptist circles revolve around the sufficiency of Scripture. In other words, is the Bible sufficient for faith and practice, or do denominations like the SBC need additional tools? Once more, the Bible confirms that it is completely sufficient for use in every good work in which we engage ourselves (e.g., 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The

heart of the debate regarding the usage of CRT and Intersectionality as analytical tools involving 1) whether or not Scripture in and of itself is sufficient; and 2) whether Christians are justified in using supplemental tools along with the Bible that derive from any source that is in competition with and incompatible with biblical teachings.

This paper has provided definitions of CRT and Intersectionality, the origin of these movements, and the benefits and risks related to the discussion of these topics. Regarding Resolution 9, whatever Christians who hold to sufficiency of Scripture do, they must act for the glory of God and stand on Scripture alone (1 Cor. 10:31).³¹ May Southern Baptists debate cordially, scrutinize carefully, and evaluate everything based on its conformity to scriptural teachings.

To learn more, see Issues 2-4 of the *Sufficiency of Scripture* Series.



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³¹ Cf. Exod. 24:4; Deut. 4:1-2; 17:19; Josh. 8:34; Pss. 19:7-10; 119:11, 89, 105, 140; Isa. 34:16; 40:8; Jer. 15:16; 36:1-32; Matt. 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Rom. 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Heb. 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:25; 2 Pet. 1:19-21.

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