

How Believers Can Distort God's Word

Whenever somebody mentions Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa, what do you imagine? Likely, your thoughts drift to the painting's infamous stoic expression or its mysterious legacy. What you probably don't think about is the thick bulletproof glass that sits between the Mona Lisa and art gallery patrons. Vandals have attempted to distort the portrait by throwing acid, rocks and red paint at the portrait for centuries. So the world's most famous work of art must be protected.

Our broken world constantly tries to vandalize famously cherished works, so why would we expect God's valued work of art to be any different? Like the defensive glass in an art gallery, Scripture too must be protected from those who are twisting its contents and damaging its legacy.

As you might have heard, there is a "millennial problem" within the church. Religion analysts, pundits and preachers alike are struggling to grasp why young adults raised in evangelical-Pentecostal, charismatic, Baptist and nondenominational-churches are departing from the Christian faith at rapid rates. Simultaneously, Christians are watching with shock and horror as the state of America's morality and foundational Judeo-Christian principles follow the trend of descent.

As a millennial myself and public-policy analyst, I can tell you first-hand that the action needed to fix both problems cannot be found digging into complex data, hazy statistics or even lobbying our representatives' offices in Washington, D.C. For too long, Christian culture warriors have been so focused on vandals' threats to our faith from secular society that we failed to notice the damage being done from within our own evangelical community.

It is painful to admit, but within many evangelical churches, campus ministries, and even Christian universities, believers let our guard down. And so, the Christian Left crept in quietly championing liberalism and feeding a damaged and distorted version of the gospel to young evangelicals.

As I explain in greater detail in my new book *Distortion: How the New Christian Left is Twisting the Gospel and Damaging the Faith*, the Christian Left must dismantle the authority of God's Word before it can convince young evangelicals that same-sex marriage, abortion, taxpayer-funded abortifacients, feminism, pacifism, Christian discrimination, and the expansion of a federal nanny state are biblically endorsed.

To do this, the Christian Left typically starts by excluding mentions of "sin," "hell" and "transformation" from their sermons, lectures or Sunday school lessons. This way, the need to address and turn away from immorality is intentionally avoided. Next, they incite confusion in millennials' minds regarding the clarity of Scripture. Some among the Christian Left will point to Levitical law outlined in the Old Testament and say that because we do not follow these laws in the Bible, then all Christians may cherry-pick their principles. Therefore, according to the Christian Left, followers of Christ don't have to adhere to everything outlined in the New Testament either. Finally, the Christian Left has dismantled the Word of God so much that they have concocted their own cafeteria-style Christianity; that is, taking parts of the Bible out of context so that it fits their own liberal political activism.

Stay with me here. Right about now I know that these deceptive tactics are probably making your head spin. So I'll give you a clear example. Popular blogger and member of the Christian Left Rachel Held Evans, illustrated this strategy. While writing her book *Year of Biblical Womanhood: How a Liberated Woman Found Herself Sitting on Her Roof, Covering Her Head*,

and Calling Her Husband 'Master,' Evans essentially claimed that because it is impossible for women to follow all of the rules pertaining to women recorded in the Bible, then it should follow that Scripture is not an applicable guidebook for Christian women's daily lives.

Thankfully Kathy Keller, the wife of Pastor Tim Keller, pointed out in a book review published by the Gospel Coalition why Evans' formula was deceptive. "In making the decision to ignore the tectonic shift that occurred when Jesus came," Keller wrote, "you have led your readers not into a better understanding of biblical interpretation, but into a worse one. Christians don't arbitrarily ignore the Levitical code—they see it as wonderfully fulfilled in Jesus."

"Not my church," you might be thinking. "We believe in the authority of Scripture." So says Rachel Held Evans and many other Christian Left leaders shaping young evangelicals' faith and worldview.

I pray that distorted liberal theology is not permeating within your church. But a warning: Do not look for liberal political slogans or pro-abortion propaganda pinned to the bulletin board. The Christian Left is much more clever and deceptive than a simple Republican vs. Democrat debate.

America's Founding Father James Madison stated, "I believe there are more instances of abridgement of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachment of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations." Likewise, the Christian Left's abridgement of the authority of Scripture is a gradual and silent destruction of the Word of God.

At this point you might be wondering how the Christian Left can successfully persuade the millennial generation to buy into its damaged, distorted version of the gospel.

The simple answer is: Young evangelicals simply do not know

enough about their faith. Because they are not equipped with knowledge of traditional Christian teaching, history and the social science that affirms it, young evangelicals are unable to defend their faith. Therefore they are likely to fall into one of two camps: Either they buy into distorted theology, or they remain silent.

Early in my college years, I was inclined to buy into this distorted theology. Not because I wanted a more progressive ethos or because I was rebelling against my parents' "outdated" religion. My reason was that I wanted to "fit in."

Having a big heart for those in need made me and other millennials especially vulnerable. While attending a prominent Christian campus ministry, I was taught that social-justice work within the community should be priority, not traditional Christian teachings. Of course, this was appealing.

I could focus on caring for others, conveniently follow Jesus, and avoid offending anyone because topics like same-sex marriage and abortion were off limits.

I'll admit that as a new, earnest member of this campus ministry, I tried to take countercultural biblical stands. I tried to confront the excessive alcohol abuse among my fellow evangelical peers and spoke against abortion.

Realizing my Christian friends, and some among the leadership, were uncomfortable with these conversation topics, I found it easier to stick with social justice as my Christian focal point. Seemingly, it was the compassionate route because at least I kept friends that way. Wrong!

Thankfully, my parents and other mentors were committed to speaking all of God's truths in love to me. I finally recognized how I was snuffing out portions of the gospel in order to maintain popularity among my peers.

My experience is not unique. It is the growing trend among millennials raised within the evangelical community. Beyond being a millennial and analyst at the Institute on Religion and Democracy, one of my most important roles is Sunday school teacher to middle school-aged kids. My students are bright, funny and bold. But I often hear them explain how many around them—in and outside of our church—bombard their heads with messages of “don’t judge,” “tolerance,” “coexist,” and “political correctness.” These buzzwords intimidate them.

Seasoned conservative Christians have heard all these empty words before and remain unfazed. But for young kids who have seeds of confusion planted about Scripture’s clarity coupled with the fact that they love their non-Christian friends, these words cause fear. So they shy away from mentioning their faith in God and His Word that is inherently offensive to a fallen world. So when popular Christian culture leaders tell young evangelicals that they can appease both the world and Jesus, then, of course this distorted theology captures their attention.

But the Christian Left’s damage doesn’t end with simply a misguided generation. Their distortions lead back to the “millennial problem” I mentioned earlier. Once young adults buy into the lie that Scripture is not authoritative, then they find themselves drifting toward questioning, doubting and abandoning the faith altogether. After all, why believe in words that hold no tangible or applicable value?

There is good news. Like the art gallery’s steps to preserve and protect the Mona Lisa, Christians too can take precautions to guard God’s Word. Read your Bible and commit it to memory. Next, ask questions about the theological beliefs of your church leadership, seminary instructors, and the millennials you know. Their answers may shock you. Then finally pray for wisdom and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the absolute truths contained in God’s Word.

Popular culture, inside and outside of the church, will try to damage and distort Scripture's value and its authoritative role in Christians' lives. But as followers of Christ, we can stand up and protect all of its contents with good conscience.

Remember that the countercultural messages found in the Bible were not crafted by conservative evangelicals. The Bible is not our words but the divinely inspired work of art produced by the one true living God. Scripture certainly deserves to be protected.

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