

What Is Moralistic Therapeutic Deism?

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

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sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Tuesday, February 26, 2019

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Well, thank you all for coming and for joining us over the live stream. Tonight we're going to do something a little different. We're going to take a little pause button on the series on the Psalms to do something that I've been preparing over a number of months and I'm very eager to get into it and to share these things with you over the next few weeks. It is a brief series, it's going to be five weeks, if that's brief, then it's going to be a brief series; if that's long, it's going to be a long series. It's all a matter of perspective, isn't it? Scripture says there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, Ecclesiastes 3:4. So we don't mind laughing from time to time in the pulpit when it comes up naturally, but what we want to do is start a series to give us some perspective and some discernment on the desperately lost age in which we live. I like from time to time to do series that take on realms of thought and practice that need to be exposed and refuted for the sake of the health of Christians and of the Church of Jesus Christ, and last spring in 2018, we did a series on legalism that we did on some Sundays, in the fall last year, we did a series on the charismatic movement, and in those two series, you kind of find things that are taking place within the church of Christ, things that are practiced, things that are thought, things that are taught, and we wanted to deal with those and refute those, and those are all available on our website. Tonight, we're going to expand out a little bit further beyond the walls of the church of Christ and deal with something and introduce you to some terms that are perhaps not familiar to you.

In my reading over the past several months, I have been studying a phrase that has been used to express the religious sentiment, the prevailing religious sentiment in Western culture and that's what I want to talk about here over the next few weeks. What is this phrase, what is this realm that we're going to assault with the word of God over the next few weeks? It's a mouthful, it's a mouthful that is known as moralistic therapeutic deism. What is moralistic therapeutic deism and why would we bother teaching on it here on a series of Tuesday evenings? Well, stay with me because what we're going to find is that when we get our minds around this, we're going to have our minds around an awful lot and things that on the surface that sound rather innocuous and harmless, we're going to see how deeply rooted they are in deceiving people and even deceiving people within the church.

A few weeks ago, my son helped me pull out a peach tree from our front yard that was sitting on a little bit of a slope and we thought it was going to be a rather easy task and

just pull it out and be done with it, but by the time we had gotten the straps around it and he had spun the tires on his SUV trying to pull it out, by the time it finally came out we had torn out a huge chunk of land that we never would have expected when we just grabbed hold of the tree and started to pull on it with the straps and his vehicle. Well, moralistic therapeutic deism is like that. You grab hold of this and you pull it up by the roots and you find that it leaves a huge spiritual vacuum in what is left behind and there is a huge hole that is left when you understand what it is teaching and how far and how deep its roots go into the way that most people think about God and spiritual life both within professing Christianity and even beyond it. So this is very very crucial and I just ask you to follow along over the next few weeks and you'll see how all of that plays out.

The term moralistic therapeutic deism was first coined in a book that was published in 2005 and the name of this book was "Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers," by a researcher named Christian Smith. Christian having no connection with, you know, Christianity, just his name. And in this book, what they did was they reported on the results of a comprehensive study that they did of the spiritual lives of over 3,000 American teenagers based on telephone and face-to-face interviews. Now this is a very important subject, a very important term even if you have never heard of it, which I suspect is perhaps the majority of you. Moralistic therapeutic deism has attracted the attention and commentary of such prominent names and organizations as Al Mohler, the Ligonier Conference, the Gospel Coalition, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, among others of lesser renown, and they all consistently say that they believe that what the authors in "Soul Searching" identified is an accurate diagnosis of religion in America today and so in light of that, we believe that it is important for us to understand.

Now before I go any further, what I want to say is that even though the term may be unfamiliar and some of the things that we go through this evening may be packaged in a way that sound new to your ears, I think that you will quickly come to identify and say, "Oh, that's what I see. That's what I've heard in other so-called Christian churches. That's what my neighbors say about God." You're going to find that this is something that is very real and practical and powerful, even though you may not know it by this particular name. In fact, I was showing one of my daughters my notes this afternoon beforehand and she said, "This is describing my boss." She had never seen this but when she saw the presuppositions and the things that we're going to talk about, she said, "This is describing exactly who my boss is and what he believes," and I think that you will find it to be true in your own understanding as well.

What is moralistic therapeutic deism? Moralistic therapeutic deism describes the presuppositions that define the worldview of many who claim to believe in God. Let me just repeat that: it describes, it summarizes the presuppositions that define the worldview of many who claim to believe in God. Now, here's what makes this difficult, here's what makes this slippery, here's what makes it so elusive. There is probably not a single person in the world that would declare themselves, if you asked them who they are spiritually, there's probably no one who would say, "I happen to be a moralistic therapeutic deist." It doesn't work that way. It's far more subtle than that. It's much more vague than that. It's vague enough to find root in nominal Christianity. This spirit and this mindset can be

found in Catholicism, in Mormonism, in Eastern religions and Islam, even though none of those religions and none of their teachers would explicitly promote it, certainly under the name by which it has been labeled. This phrase or not this phrase, this mindset, moralistic therapeutic deism, is powerful enough to generate genuine hostility against true Christianity, it is subtle enough that it can seduce Christians who lack discernment and so what we want to do is we want to pull it out of the shadows, expose it to the light and at the end of these next five weeks we are going to have, I believe, a far clearer idea of what true Christianity is and what it is not, and we're not only going to see in a negative sense what is wrong with this prevailing spiritual sentiment that animates Western culture, but we are also going to, by the time we're done, have a far clearer idea of what true Christianity looks like and what the true practice of Christianity is. So that's a pretty lofty claim that I think we will justify by the time we're done in five or six weeks.

Tonight, all I want to do is introduce the topic. This may be a comparatively brief message by my standards, which means it could go pretty long, I guess. We are going to introduce terms tonight and explain them and then in the following four weeks, what we intend to do is assess it and go through it systematically and apply the biblical text to it and to apply theological, right theological thinking to it in a way that will clarify it for us, and here's what I think you will find: when I start to unfold what the so-called creed of moralistic therapeutic deism is, some of you, perhaps many of you, will have a response that says, "Well, what's wrong with that?" By the end of our time, you'll say, "Goodness, this is really bad." And to the extent that there is this initial sympathy for what I describe, what you find is that that initial sympathy will give you a measuring stick by which to see how much it has influenced even the thinking of biblical Christians. It's frightening to me, to realize the hold and the power and the depth and the grip that this mindset has.

Now, here's what we need to understand at the start just before I go any further. What the authors of "Soul Searching" did was they identified five basic principles that are at work in the mind of teenage culture. That was their object of study. That was their field of study and you might say, "Well, why are we even bothering with it, then, as a predominantly adult gathering here? Why would we study what teenagers are thinking?" Well, the authors address it and I'm not going to justify the topic here in a slightly different way than what they did because this is really really crucial for us to understand. They studied the spiritual thinking, the spiritual thought of teenagers, okay? Now you might say, "Well, what does that have to do with us?" Here's the problem, beloved, here is the serious deep problem, and when I say serious, I mean that in a really profound sense, this is a serious problem: where do you think that teenagers get their spiritual thinking from if not the adults in their lives and the churches that they attend? What these authors uncovered in all of their interviews and their research, what they uncovered is simply a reflection of what churches had been feeding into young people and what the adults in their lives have been conveying to them about what the reality of God is, and the fact that the teenage thinking is so distorted is simply a reflection of the fact that this is what adults think also. So the fact that the subject of study was teenagers is actually giving us a reflection of what the entire mindset in Western culture is, thus the attention from some of the most prominent minds in Christian thinking today that have been given to this over the past several years, although their treatment has been in some cases, brief

and not as helpful as I think that it could be, part of the reason why I thought it was important for me to speak into it as well.

Okay, moralistic therapeutic deism. Moralistic, 10 syllables in those three words, moralistic therapeutic deism. Let's understand what it says. First of all, what we want to look at tonight is simply to identify what the creed of moralistic therapeutic deism is, or five principles that identify the spiritual worldview of moralistic therapeutic deism. What we want to do here is just kind of see it in a broad overview fashion, see how it all ties together, and then start to unpack it tonight and in the four weeks to come. What is it that marks the thinking of Western culture when it comes to God, generally speaking, the prevailing sentiment that crosses even not just denominational boundaries within Christianity but jumps across to express the thinking of people in other religions? The authors listed five. They were not exactly systematic theologians. I might have expressed things a little bit differently, in a different sequence, but we'll take it in the way that they presented it.

First of all, you find in this worldview, this poorly articulated worldview in the thinking of many, first of all it's this: a god exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth. A god exists, there is a god, he created the world, he ordered the world, and he watches over human life on earth. "Okay," you might think, "that doesn't sound so bad. That's kind of what I believe. What could be wrong with that?" 2. What does this god want? He wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. Well, who could be against people being good and nice to each other and being fair? How could you be against that? What's the problem here? You see, this is pretty subtle but it goes somewhere. God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. It feels kind of good to hear things like this, doesn't it? 3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about yourself. Why do we live, what's the purpose of life, what should we be seeking out of life, what is the reason that you exist? The reason that you exist and what should be happening, what you want out of life according to moralistic therapeutic deism, is your personal happiness and that you feel good about life, feel good about yourself; inside you'd have a sense of wellness that wells up within you and makes you feel well. Well, well, well. 4. God does not particularly need to be involved in your life except when you need him to resolve a problem. God doesn't need to be particularly involved in your life except when he is needed to resolve a problem. Now I'll talk about this more in a few weeks, but one of the ways that you can tell, one of the ways that you can identify in yourself if you've been influenced by the mindset of moralistic therapeutic deism even if you've never heard that term before, one of the ways that you can recognize it in others is this, and before, before I was a true Christian, I was a moralistic therapeutic deist before the term even existed because, and something that I've always stated as being central to my testimony before I became a true Christian was this, I only prayed when I wanted something. I only prayed when I needed something. Prayer was a means to get what I wanted that I couldn't get on my own so I appealed to a higher power, I appealed to the God that I thought I knew to give me what I couldn't get on my own, otherwise I was more than content when life was going well, I was more than content when I was happy to have nothing to do with God however I was defining him in my heart at that

time. So prayer was just simply a selfish exercise to get what I want or to get me delivered from my problems or to help me get an "A" on my exam that had nothing to do with rendering true worship and praise to God for his inherent worth. There's a huge distinction there and the practice of prayer helps to expose someone who has adopted this as their mindset. They only turn to God when they want something. They only turn to God when they've got a problem. The only think and pray to him when life isn't going the way that the want it to go. That's a moralistic therapeutic deist for you and we'll leave it there for now. We'll come back to that in time to come. Fifthly and finally, good people go to heaven when they die. Good people go to heaven when they die.

So what I want to do is just go back and run through these 1 through 5 again just to kind of set them in your mind. I know we're covering a lot of ground that may not necessarily be familiar and that's why I want to go kind of slow and methodically through this because I intend to decimate this line of thinking with biblical teaching over the next few weeks. This is absolutely essential for us to get and to get right.

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The essential goal of life is to be happy and feel good about yourself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

Now, what we're going to do as we proceed now, having set forth the so-called creed of this informal religion, this worldview, we're going to examine this worldview biblically to protect you and your loved ones, and to equip you to interact wisely with your circle of influence, have a measure of discernment that leads you to be able to zero in on this misguided mistaken thinking and to be able to apply biblical truth to it in order to bring truth to bear on the souls of those that are around you, and perhaps even to sanctify your own thinking about what it means to be a Christian; for you to grow in your own mind, in your own heart, for you to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to him be the glory forever amen, as 2 Peter 3:18 says. Now with all of this said, and just to repeat myself, this is not a formal religion and it makes it hard and difficult to refute. That's why I've been at work at this for a few months now. People hold these views in an ill-defined way, no doubt sometimes in self-contradictory ways. They hold them in a way that allows them to apply selective Bible verses out of context in support of what they think rather than systematically teaching through Scripture, rather than systematically reading Scripture, just cherry-picking certain verses that would seem to prop up this worldview, and here's the problem, beloved, it insulates them, it inoculates them against truth, against the true Gospel, against that which would convict them of sin and bring them to their knees before Christ in repentance and saving faith. There are souls greatly at stake here that make it critical for us to deal with it in a thorough way.

So here's what we want to do. We've seen the creed of moralistic therapeutic deism with those five points, now what I want to do for the rest of our time this evening is to just briefly summarize what is meant by each of those three terms, moralistic therapeutic deism. So question 2 tonight or point 2 tonight is what does moralistic mean within this worldview? What does moralistic mean within this worldview? Well, this religious viewpoint is moralistic because it teaches that a happy life is found in being a good moral person. You can be happy if you're good and moral. Now they are defining morality in a way that has very little to do with actual biblical truth, it's more morality according to the prevailing sentiment of culture at the time, that you're just kind of going along with and you agree with what everybody else thinks. That's what they mean by it. To be moralistic in this worldview means that you're nice, that you're kind, that you're pleasant, respectful, responsible, you work on self-improvement, you take care of your health, and you do your best to be successful. You are moralistic, you're moral in the sense that you're nice and pleasant and you're easy to get along with. You're moralistic in the sense that, and this, and you start to see where this is leveraged against people in social discourse and how it is leveraged against Christians in the moral issues of the day, in moralistic therapeutic deism, beloved, you must be someone that others like. You must not be disruptive or obnoxious. In this morality, you are supposed to be agreeable with others and to feel good about yourself. You're not to confront people with truth from Scripture, you're not to say that there is an absolute right or wrong, you let people have their truth, you have your truth and we all get along together without asserting truth claims against one another. So religion, broadly defined, spirituality if you prefer that term, religion exists to serve that horizontal end, that horizontal goal, that we would get along with each other and be nice to each other and accept each other no matter what the other person is doing. So embedded in the sense that we should use the preferred pronouns of transgender people irregardless of what their biological sex actually is, what's embedded in that is this sense of morality that says, "You need to be agreeable and go along with everything and don't raise questions about truth in the midst of it. Don't raise questions about the true biblical nature of homosexuality or of homosexual marriage. If this is what people want to do, you go along with it because that's what spiritual people do, that's what's right." And you see, you start to see anyway, how embedded in this worldview is that which would marginalize the absolute truth claims of biblical Christianity because, "It's not nice to disagree, that's not kind, that's not pleasant so keep your views to yourself and let me be me."

Now getting back within the mindset of MTD, I'll use the acronym there just to save myself 10 syllables every time I want to refer to it, go from 10 to 3, who knows how much time that'll save me. You can recognize this moral person in MTD because other people like him, like her. He or she accepts others without being judgmental. The key Bible verse for this moralistic aspect of MTD would be Matthew 7:1, the truncated version of Matthew 7:1, "Do not judge." Now, you don't need the rest of the context of that, you don't need to know, worry about what Jesus was actually teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, it's simply enough to assert that we are not to judge one another and in this moralistic view, you go along with what society is doing, you go along with one another, you're not disagreeable, you don't judge others, you are just simply nice and kind and

pleasant in the whole sphere of things, and that lets you get along, and that's what you are expected to do in this worldview.

Now, beloved, again I'll talk about all of these things more in future weeks, but what I want you to see just right now in this mindset, in this worldview is this, and as a biblical Christian you should start thinking along these lines: notice that this kind of moralism is completely horizontal. It is directed toward men. It's directed toward human relationships. There is no verticality to it. There is no God-centeredness to it. It's all about how you get along with your fellow man. That's what they mean by this kind of moralism. Beloved, if you're getting along with your fellow man, then there is no reason for you to search further for anything further spiritually oriented. You need not worry about whether you've offended a holy God. What does that matter if as long as you are getting along with men here on earth? It's horizontal. It's not God-centered.

Now for our third point: what does therapeutic mean in this mindset? What does therapeutic mean in this mindset, or as Barney Fife once famously said, it's therapeutic. "It's therapeutic, Andy," as he was seeking to counsel Andy about his girl problems. He said, "Lay it all out right there, it'll be therapeutic for you." But we'll go by therapeutic. The word therapeutic comes from the Greek verb *theraepuo* meaning "I heal." To heal. It has a healing aspect to it. It makes you feel better and MTD is therapeutic in the sense that – oh, this is so important – it is therapeutic in the sense that it provides psychological benefits to its adherents, to the people that have this mindset. It's therapeutic in the sense that it makes them feel better. Religion exists to make people feel good, happy, secure and at peace. The point of religion is what it does for you subjectively, how it makes you feel about life and how it makes you feel about yourself. If your religion makes you feel good about yourself, then it has achieved its purpose. It helps you to resolve problems and to get along well with others. The authors of "Soul Searching" quote one conservative Protestant saying this, a teenage girl, as I recall and she said, quote, "God is like someone who is always there for you. He'll always help you go through whatever you're going through. When I became a Christian, I was just praying and it always made me feel better." The idea here is that that's the purpose of religion, is to make you feel better, and if you feel better, you've gotten what you need out of.

Now I've been in ministry for a few years now, over the years I've seen a lot of Christian testimonies of people seeking baptism and things like that, you know, going back even to my days in California, and sometimes from time to time you'll see this mindset bubbling up in the testimonies, a testimony that is not giving a clear statement of conviction of sin, repentance, and faith in Christ to be forgiven of sin, to be reconciled to God, and a sense of being delivered from eternal judgment and now being on the road of eternal life and being a present possessor of eternal life. No, instead, instead what you find from time to time is people saying, "Once I became a Christian," whatever they mean by that, "I started feeling better about life and that's how I know that I'm a Christian. I feel better about life," rather than, "I know that I've been reconciled to God after my sinful nature manifested itself and I became aware that I was worthy of judgment." You see, and people will testify about becoming Christians and explain it in terms that, "I feel better about life, I'm better able to face my trials," rather than having any kind of vertical sense

that, "I was an offense to God and Christ died in order to forgive me of my sins." You can have that testimony without even referring to the cross and my concern as a pastor has always been over the years when I see testimonies like that, you know, does this person even understand the Gospel? If you can define it simply in terms that you feel better about yourself and not even reference the holiness of God, not even reference the forgiveness that Christ purchased with his own blood at the cross, in what sense do you understand the Gospel? Now I realize I'm being a little animated and forceful in what I say here. It's not because I'm upset with anybody or that I was ever upset with people who gave me testimonies like that, I'm just concerned for their soul. This is what they think the essence of Christianity is, that they now feel better about life, because the underlying presupposition is that the goal, the purpose of faith is simply to do that, to make you feel better about your life, to make you feel good about it.

Beloved, may I point out to you that moralistic therapeutic deism is the religion of Joel Osteen and all those like him, about how God wants you to have your best life now, and God's on your side, without any indication that God was ever against you in the first place; that God is a righteous judge who is angry with sinners every day, as Psalm 7 says. None of that. Romans 1, that passage in Psalm 7 that I alluded to, none of that has any place in moralistic therapeutic deism because the whole purpose of God is to make you feel better, and why would he be angry with you, then, if that's the purpose of life and religion? MTD is driving a Gospel presentation that leads with the idea that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, "Let me tell you, God can help you, God can fix you, God can make you feel better." That's what they mean, that's what the sense of therapeutic means in MTD, and beloved, here's the problem, here's the problem: as long as you're happy, as long as you feel happy, then you don't need to fuss over what the truth is, you don't need to fuss over what true doctrine is, you don't even need to fuss over what the real Gospel message is. If you feel good, religion, faith, has attained its purpose and there is nothing further to explore, there is no reason to discuss it any further. That's lethal. That's dangerous. What I want you to see again is that this is all earthbound, it's all man-centered. The whole purpose of faith is to give you subjective benefits. It provides therapy for you as you go through the challenges of life, and the spirituality of this worldview, then, is geared toward the inner feelings of people rather than a revealed standard of righteousness from a holy God that has been made known in the 66 books of the Bible. You don't need the Bible if MTD is true, you don't need the Bible as long as you feel good about yourself. It divorces truth from religion.

Well, let's go to a fourth point here and believe it or not, I'm actually going to open Scripture and point out some things to you from Scripture here before we're done. I realize we haven't done that yet but we needed time to get it all out on the table. You don't complain about the fact that you had to set the table and get the food ready and put it out before you could eat, right? Well, that's what we're doing here today, we're setting the table and getting the meal ready so that we can eat and be profited by it. 4. What does deism mean in moralistic therapeutic deism? It means this: the deism of this worldview, of this set of presuppositions, relates to its view of God, and the deism is this – oh, this is so very important – a god exists who created the world and defines our general moral order but he is not particularly personally involved in your affairs. He keeps a safe

distance. In other words, he allows you your autonomy. You can go through life as you wish. God does not have a standard of righteousness that he applies to you or by which he will judge you, he keeps to himself pretty much. This god is not demanding. This god makes no assertions, moral requirements upon your soul or upon your life. In fact, in this worldview, God can't be like that. God can't be demanding because – follow me here, beloved – God can't be like that because God's job is to solve our problems and to make people feel good. That's why he exists, is so that you would feel good.

Now if the point is to make you feel good, in what sense could he ever make demands, unwelcome demands upon you? He couldn't do that. That would be contrary to the reason he exists. In what sense, if God is keeping a safe distance, in what sense is there any room for what Jesus said the ministry of the Holy Spirit would be, that he would convict the world of sin, judgment and righteousness? But under the worldview of MTD, God is something like a roadside assistance mechanic. You're driving along, your car is doing well, you don't need the roadside mechanic. There is no reason to know him. You don't know who he is, there is no personal relationship there, that roadside mechanic makes no demands on your life, he has nothing to do with your life in normal circumstances, but when something breaks down, when you're stranded alongside the road, he will come and fix it for you with no expectation of a personal relationship afterwards. He'll come and he'll fix things for you, get you going again, but there's no expectation, no demands. He's just there to get you up and running again as soon as possible. This god of MTD, "god" in quotes with a small "g," this is a nice god who helps you be nice and to feel nice. If you're sad, if you're discouraged, he helps you feel better. If you have problems, he'll intervene, he'll help you, but beyond that he's not involved in the affairs of your life or of the world. He accepts you as you are and he makes no demands upon you.

Now what's the natural outcome of that when it comes to death and heaven and hell? In this MTD framework, most everyone goes to heaven when they die. Why wouldn't they? "Why would God send me to hell? I'm nice and he likes me, and who wouldn't like me, I'm nice?" Now beloved, for people who want autonomy and pleasant circumstances, this religion of moralistic therapeutic deism is exactly what the doctor ordered. "I just want to live my life without any problems. I want to be my own boss and I want things to go well with me. If something happens and I need some help, I'll call upon God like George Bailey did in 'It's a Wonderful Life.' God, I'm not a praying man but I don't know what to do here and so I need your help here," on the assumption that God will just automatically jump and respond to them just because they ask.

So if you want a life without God making any demands upon you, if you want a life free from moral obligation, if you simply want out of life good circumstances that are comfortable without any challenges or trials that you have to go through, then you are a prime candidate to be deceived and sucked in by this worldview that we have called moralistic therapeutic deism. If you just want to be happy, that's the place to go. If you just want to be happy, man, spool up Joel Osteen and let the image that his dentist and his hairstylist have put together in an external way, take you for a ride. It'll be smooth as silk. It'll go down like syrup. Why wouldn't you do that? Why don't we all become moralistic therapeutic deists except for the fact that it takes a lot longer to say that than to say, "I'm a

reformed Baptist"? You go and tell somebody you're a moralistic therapeutic deists, they've given up on you by the sixth syllable and they're going off to something else.

What's the problem with this worldview? What is the problem with moralistic therapeutic deism? What stands in the way of it? Two words, it is the same two words that guarantee you the authority of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. The problem with moralistic therapeutic deism is Jesus Christ. He runs the whole system. He is the mortal enemy of moralistic therapeutic deism and if you wanted to add a fifth point to your notes here, you could just write it out as Christ and MTD, save your writing hand a cramp. Christ and MTD. There is not a slide for this because I'm inserting a fifth point here. I don't have my pen with me, I'd write it in right now. I like that. Christ and MTD. We'll look at some scriptures now. How are we doing on time? Eh, good enough.

Jesus Christ and his clear words in Scripture reject the horizontal moralism of MTD. Let's turn to the Gospel of John 3. I won't make a habit of teaching for 50 minutes without turning you to Scripture, but I've already explained and justified that, I don't need to repeat myself. The words of Christ reject the horizontal moralism of MTD. He said in John 3:3, "Truly, truly, I say to you unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Unless you have been born from above, unless God does a work in your heart, you cannot enter the kingdom. It's immediately vertical with Christ. "Unless you are born of the Spirit, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God," he says in John 3:5. In verse 7 he says, "You must be born again." There is no place for the new birth, there is no need for the new birth, there is no need for regeneration in MTD because everybody is just fine the way they are. Christ will have none of it. He says you have to be born again and if you're not born again, you're not going to heaven. There's no room for that in MTD. Christ is an uncomfortable presence for those who hold to this mindset, for those who govern their life according to this man-centered false approach to God and to life.

Can I point out something else? I talked about the moralism of MTD, meaning that, you know, people, you need to be someone that people like, well, a pox on that. No. No, that can't possibly be true because people, just remember, remember the whole problem with MTD is Jesus Christ. He is the whole problem with this worldview and the problem here that Christ presents to this worldview, may I remind you, is that men did not like him. They called him Beelzebul, attributed his works to Satan, and when their words weren't enough, they crucified him. "We will not have this man reign over us. We have no king but Caesar. Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!" They cried out to Pilate. They hated him. There is no possibility that the worldview of MTD is true if it can't include Jesus Christ.

Not only that, Christ himself rejected any idea of a therapeutic self-absorption about feeling good about yourself. Look at John 8, turn there with me. One thing about preparing messages over a series, over a period of months instead of a week is when you finally get the opportunity to let it all out, man, it gushes out like a river because all these things you've been storing up finally get expression. In John 8:21, Jesus said to the Jews, "I go away, and you will seek Me, and you will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come." Jesus tells them plainly, "You are going to die in sin." He's not making

them feel good about themselves, he is warning them about their spiritual condition, that they are on the brink of eternal perdition. The Jews didn't buy it, verse 22, "Surely He won't kill Himself, will He, since He says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'? And He was saying to them, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.'" You have nothing to do with the realm of God. That's hardly going to make them feel good. And in verse 24 he says, "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." MTD encourages people, if by nothing else, by its silence, to bypass Christ as a means of reconciliation to God. It teaches people that they can just call out to God however they are, whoever they are, wherever they are, they can just cry out and God will immediately bend to their will and do whatever they want him to do to make them feel better. Jesus is having nothing of that. He said, "Unless you believe in Me, you're going to die in your sins."

So Christ rejects their moralism, demanding that they be born again. He rejects this therapeutic self-absorption, "I hope you feel better. I want to make you feel better." He comes alongside and he warns people, "You're going to die in your sins without Me." And there's another aspect, the deism of MTD, the words of Christ reject this idea of a distant undemanding god. You cannot reconcile the god of MTD with the words of Christ. Look at John 14. I want to look at a couple of passages here. John 14, a familiar passage. In verse 6 he says "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." He speaks to all of humanity, he speaks to every man, woman, boy and girl that has ever lived and ever will live, "Unless you come to God through Me, you will not come to Him at all." That's pretty demanding. That's a vertical assertion over against the idea that God is just distant and undemanding and all he wants to do is help you out when you've got a problem that's making you feel bad. Christ steps into this mindset and obliterates it by his authority and by his claims.

Turn back to the Gospel of Mark 8. A distant undemanding deity? Not Christ. Mark 8:34, "He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.'" He demands personal allegiance and self-denial if you are to become a Christian, and if you don't want that, if you just want to keep it to yourself he says in verse 35, "whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" "You get everything you want out of life," he says, "well and good, but you just lost your soul. Make a choice. What do you want? Without Me you can gain the world and lose your soul." Beloved, Christ did not come to affirm you in your goodness, he came to save you from sin. In Luke 5:31 and 32, we don't need to turn there, he said, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. It's not those who are well who need a physician but those who are sick." So the only people that are reconciled to God are those who come to Christ for forgiveness of sin, otherwise they are lost no matter how good they feel about themselves during this lifetime.

And the last thing that Christ did was to come and to affirm people with a preoccupation with the horizontal matters of the things of this temporary life. Look at John 15, and this

idea that the whole purpose of religion, the whole purpose of morality is to make you somebody that the world will like. I remember someone telling me over 30 years ago, "You know, if people could just be nice, if we could just be Christians and just be nice and smile at each other, more people would become Christians." What a foolish simplistic statement that has nothing to do with anything that Scripture says about the matter. Christ said the exact opposite in verse 18. He says, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you." True Christians, those who have, pardon the expression, true religion, those who are truly in Christ are not going to be loved by the world at all. Why do you think it is that Facebook silences so many Christians in the things that they say?

Elsewhere the Apostle John said in 1 John 3:13, you don't need to turn there, it's a brief verse, he said, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you." Don't be surprised. This is the nature of true life in Christ, is that it sets you in opposition to the world, and if the world crucified Christ, you'd better believe that it's going to hate his true disciples. They hated the Master, they'll hate his servant. This isn't difficult in the sense that it's not hard to understand.

So beloved, we come to the end of our time tonight with the recognition that the spirit of moralistic therapeutic deism opposes the biblical Christianity. It is a seductive, soul-killing flattery of the pride of man and the autonomy of man, and the fact that teaching like this predominates in a lot of Christian pulpits, should not restrain us from condemning it and exposing it and warning people that what you are hearing is not true Christianity according to the words of Jesus Christ at all. Our only defense against this when it so flatters our minds and is so appealing to our carnal desires, our only defense against this is the words of Christ found in Scripture, in the inerrant word of God that teaches us the truth, that teaches us to deny ourselves and to come to Christ, pick up our cross and follow after him, something that has nothing to do with this worldly spirit that passes for religion in our perverted and degraded age.

So, friends, it's worth asking after a time like this, who is your God? Is it the God of the Bible as he has made himself known in the Lord Jesus Christ? Or have you been seduced and following after this God of moralistic therapeutic deism who is no god at all, who is simply a god of your own selfish heart, wanting what you want, wanting your autonomy, wanting pleasant circumstances without any regard to Christ? You don't need to be a Christian to want your circumstances to go well. You don't need to be a Christian to want to pray to a god who will help you whenever you demand his presence to jump and serve you. You don't need to be a Christian for that. The reason is that that's not Christianity.

So what we propose to do on the next four Tuesdays that I'm in this pulpit on Tuesdays, is to spend the next few weeks dismantling this further. I haven't even gotten started with what I want to say here tonight. We will spend the next few weeks dismantling it and come to clear convictions about what we believe and what we're privileged to proclaim.

Father, help us to that end. May Your Spirit search our hearts, convict us where we have *assimilated the spirit of our age, and deliver us from it, Father. Let us be true servants, true slaves of our Lord Jesus Christ, and not slaves of our own appetites that are tied to this world and simply tied to our own autonomy and desires and goals that are self-centered in their perspective. Raise up before us the glory of Christ that we might follow after Him, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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