

# Kingdom Race Theology: Is This God's Plan or Something Else?

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Tony Evans is the senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas. Evans is also an author and an entrepreneur. His radio show, *The Alternative with Tony Evans*, can be heard on 1,400 stations in 130 countries. Evans has been a faithful gospel minister for more than four decades. His imprint on evangelicalism is commendable.

At 72 years old, Evans, a non-denominational Pastor, has partnered with the Southern Baptist Convention on a new project. During the SBC's annual meeting, leaders announced the *Unify Project*, a racial reconciliation program to equip SBC churches to work together for racial unity. The project, led by outgoing SBC President Ed Litton and former President Fred Luter, is in partnership with Evans's organization, *The Urban Initiative*.

In light of recent SBC resolutions on critical race theory (CRT) and this new partnership, I thought to examine Evans's recent work on the subject of "race." As Evans is offering an alternative to CRT called Kingdom Race Theology (KRT), this article will demonstrate the dangerous definitions that serve as the foundation for KRT.

## A Brief Background

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Like Evans, I have witnessed the ethnic division fomenting in the culture. Many who read this blog are familiar with the *Just Thinking Podcast* and the work Darrell Harrison and I have done over the past four years. Our efforts aim to equip church leaders and members to respond biblically to ethnic hatred, Black Lives Matter, and Critical Race Theory.

Evans's book, *Kingdom Race Theology: God's Answer to Our Racial Crisis*, has been promoted as an alternative to Critical Race Theory (CRT). In addition to the book, Evans delivered a series of messages on Kingdom Race Theology (KRT) to his congregation in 2021. As expected, Evans's talks were engaging, entertaining, and educational.

## Racism That Doesn't Require a Racist

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In his address to his congregation, Evans took the time to define key terms: racism, critical race theory, and systemic racism. Examining the definitions selected for these terms is essential to understanding the basis of his philosophical position and direction.

In this article, we'll examine each term.

Evans stated that some of the ideas he'd define, though debated by others, could prove valuable if only these ideas were appreciated and more closely examined.

In his book, Evans makes this point when he writes,

People reject these concepts, ideologies, and viewpoints out of hand rather than pursuing an honest intellectual exchange on what may be valuable.

*Kingdom Race Theology*, 18.

As Evans addressed his congregation, it was apparent that he believed KRT strikes the right balance between those who oppose him on either side. In making this claim, Evans presents a "third way" of addressing the issues of "race."

While acknowledging contemporary objections to CRT, Evans views its criticism as primarily the fault of "bad actors" who have misused it for ignoble purposes. As to who the bad actors are? Evans blames the author of *The 1619 Project*, Nikole Hannah-Jones, and Black Lives Matter founders Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi for the problems others have with CRT.

The work of loving our neighbor isn't determined by an ever-changing postmodern definition of oppression, where society is reshaped in order to coddle the most easily offended.

In his book published in 2011, titled *Oneness Embraced: A Kingdom Race Theology for Reconciliation, Unity, and Justice*, Evans details his understanding of the Marxist origins of CRT. However, much of the information on CRT's origin is absent in this current work, *Kingdom Race Theology*. While Evans clarifies that he believes that Marxist theory is antithetical to a biblical worldview, Evans still holds that relevant components of CRT can help identify racist practices.

Bringing the point home, Evans writes,

While an individual today may not be personally racist, they can contribute to the racist structures by supporting the inequitable systems still in place, or by denying that they exist.

*Kingdom Race Theology*, 36.

Evans continues,

If you are a nonracist yourself but do not actively oppose racism (willing to speak or work against racism and racist systems where they show up), you are failing to fulfill the whole letter of the law of love (Rom 13:8).

*Kingdom Race Theology*, 36.

Here, Evans misuses Scripture to punctuate a point more fittingly voiced by those promoting the gospel of anti-racism instead of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In his book, *How to Be an Antiracist*, CRT activist Ibram X. Kendi writes,

The opposite of racist isn't "not racist." It is "anti-racist." What's the difference? . . . One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an anti-racist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an anti-racist. There is no in-between safe space of "not racist."

*Ibram X. Kendi, How to Be an Antiracist.*

Kendi's evangelical call to the work of anti-racism is clear. There's no middle ground; either you're a racist, or you're an anti-racist doing the work necessary, as determined by Kendi.

Evans embraces the same approach; the opposite of racist isn't "not racist," but instead, you must do the work of anti-racism against the systems believed to be culpable. For good measure, Evans adds a Scripture verse, as if to say, "in Jesus's name," using Romans 13:8 as a reference.

However, Paul is not writing to the Christians in Rome with the admonition to work against racist systems. Furthermore, the work of loving our neighbor is not determined by an ever-changing postmodern definition of oppression, where society is reshaped in order to coddle the most easily offended. Instead, the loving neighbor is defined by the objective standards for love as found in Scripture (1 Cor 13:4–8). In addition, love is motivated by what Christ has accomplished in the heart of the believer, which may or may not include a full court press on every racialized front.

## Dangerous Definition: Critical Race Theory

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What Evans is offering is the same worldly message delivered by Kendi and those promoting the false religion of CRT. The advancing message is a *gospel* of works-righteousness which doesn't atone for sins, is insufficient to save, and its work never ends.

Next, Evans defines critical race theory as

a post-civil rights social construct that seeks to demonstrate how the embedded foundation and filter through which racist attitudes, behavior, policies, and structures have been rooted throughout the fabric of American life and systems even after those laws were changed.

*Kingdom Race Theology, 15.*

While the language is lengthy and ambiguous, what Evans delivers is but one of CRT's presuppositions: *The foundation of American culture is built upon racism.*

However, Evans misses the mark, ignoring what CRT scholars admit are the stated goals of CRT praxis.

Richard Delgado has been involved with CRT since its beginning in 1989. As a pioneer of CRT, some believe him to be its grandfather. Delgado provided the ideological space for its scholars to craft their work. As such, he clearly understands CRT theory and praxis. Delgado, a civil rights lawyer and critical race theorist, is currently a teaching professor of CRT at the University of Alabama.

In his book, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Richard Delgado writes,

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, emotions, and the unconscious. Unlike traditional civil rights discourses, which stress incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of Constitutional law.

*Richard Delgado & Jean Stephancic, Critical Race Theory: An Introduction (3rd Edition).*

Delgado explains that CRT is more than a static theory; it's a movement. Furthermore, this movement is uninterested in step-by-step incremental advances. Instead, the goal is to challenge "the very foundations of the liberal order..."

This fundamental fact about CRT is absent in Evans's definition. As he provides tacit approval and support for the aspects of CRT that he believes to be useful, Evans must inform his followers that CRT theory has a definitive praxis. When you embrace CRT theory, CRT praxis will follow.

## Dangerous Definition: Racism

While the definition of critical race theory is problematic for the reasons stated above, Evans then defines *racism* as

the conscious or subconscious (unconscious) belief in the superiority of one race over another race, or ethnicities, which manifests itself in a variety of dismissive, oppressive or exploitive ways. Racism shows up in the use of power to influence resources or communication, which is employed to discriminate against, marginalize, exploit and/or subjugate people of another race or ethnicity."

*Kingdom Race Theology, 19–20.*

There are at least two significant problems with this definition:

### 1. The theory of subconscious bias.

Evans begins his definition of racism with "the conscious or subconscious (unconscious) belief in the superiority of one race over another."

With this definition, Evans introduces the “boogeyman” of racist theory—*subconscious bias*. This idea is also known as *implicit bias* or *unconscious bias*. This theory asserts that one can determine, by testing, the internal motivations of one’s subconscious mind.

It’s challenging enough to determine what someone thinks when they are fully conscious (awake). Now, subconscious bias theory seeks to determine one’s thoughts when the person is not thinking. However, for the CRT proponent, subconscious bias is a valuable tool. Why? It asserts that even when you don’t think you’re a racist, you’re a racist, you racist.

Tests to determine one’s subconscious bias have appeared with great promise, failing at every point to deliver predictable and consistent outcomes. Implicit Attitude Testing (IAT) is a 20-year-old science introduced and established to prove subconscious bias. These tests have been under tremendous scrutiny for their lack of consistency and inability to duplicate outcomes based on scientific measures.

Even as subconscious bias has proven to be a false flag, proponents of CRT continue to use the language to their benefit; this is what Evans has done with his definition of racism.

## 2. Racism – A Floydian Definition

Before the death of George Floyd and the public promotion of CRT, the Oxford Dictionary defined racism as “prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people based on their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized.”

As Evans provides his new definition of racism, he uses a “post-George-Floydian” definition. By doing so, he posits racism as personal and systemic, a point he’ll drive home later. When Evans says, “racism shows up in the use of power,” he is speaking of more than personal hatred of another person; he’s addressing authoritative hegemonic (white) power structures—police, law, economics, public policy, etc.

This definition is dangerous as it cements the idea that only those with power can be racist. Since minorities possess no hegemonic power, they are incapable of the sin of racism, according to Evans. Furthermore, his definition establishes the Marxists’ divisions of those *oppressed* (by racism) and their *oppressors*—whites who are complicit with the systems of power.

## Dangerous Definition: Systemic Racism

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As Evans defined racism, the next domino to fall is his definition of systemic racism. With this definition, however, Evans will use his experience to illustrate systemic racism.

A critical note on the word systemic, few define it separately from the word racism. Why is this important? When something is systemic, it affects more than a particular part; it impacts the whole. When the word systemic is immediately attached to racism, systemic is often misused and misapplied to things, people, and events that are far less significant than the correct use of the word suggests.

Evans states,

Systemic racism is the presence or cyclical resultant effect of racist practices and processes embedded in and shaping the social, political, economic, legal, educational, infrastructural, medical systems and policies of a society initially established and perpetuated by the government. These then overlap and interconnect in such a way as to give an unjust advantage of resources, rights, mindsets, and privilege for a majority number of one race while denying or limiting it to a majority number of another race or ethnicity.

*Kingdom Race Theory, 23.*

This word-salad definition ignores the rules of simplicity and clarity of language. Standard practice within CRT scholarship is the overuse of terms loaded with presuppositional sentiments that, when strung together, still do not communicate a coherent thought. Definitions like these are intended to provide sufficient vagueness so that any subsequent slight, microaggression, or perceived injustice can automatically be seen as evidence of systemic racism.

After delivering his definition, Evans provides several personal examples. While many of his models fit the description of some form of racism or prejudice, they fall far short of being systemic. In an attempt to drive the point home on systemic racism, however, Evans uses a popular hypothetical example of the runners engaged in a sprint.

Evans explains, "Think of a sprint where some racers are allowed to start earlier or are allowed to start at a point much ahead of another group. The other group spends their whole time just trying to catch up—the sprint is intrinsically not equitable" (36). Evans continues, "This illustration may help you develop more empathy for this historical reality of systemic racism."

The fallacies associated with this overused example are numerous. First, no one starts life (the race) from an equal starting position. All of us have different gifts, talents, and levels of intelligence. Some had two parents, while others had one parent. Some children were born to wealthy families, yet despite a perceived advantage, they failed. Other children were born to poor families, and despite their perceived disadvantage, they succeeded. How a person begins in life can be helpful. However, none of us are promised an equitable outcome or even the same starting point as Evans and others would have you to believe. The Utopian vision that, had it not been for "systemic racism," we all would have started from the same point is a myth.

Second, none of us are running the same race. Suppose Evans had used Scripture instead of popular cultural analogies. In that case, he could have read Paul's admonition to Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). Paul's race was his alone to complete. God set the success and setbacks that Paul endured along the way to conform Paul into the image of Christ.

Remember the words of Jesus to Peter when Peter wanted to know about someone else's race? After the resurrection, Jesus restores Peter to ministry, telling Peter to feed his sheep. However, Peter began looking at the disciples around him. Curious about their race and what the Lord had in store for one of them, Peter asks, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remains until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" (John 21:22)

Rather than pointing people to Christ and encouraging them to focus their energy on the race God has given them, Evans's example fosters envy in those who believe they are "behind" in the race. Furthermore, those who think they are ahead are provided sufficient guilt about their status. In addition, the example of the runners in a sprint only works insofar as the storyline remains neatly tied to the history of racism in America. If we expanded the race to include people from around the world, the story's intended impact would fall apart. Those previously "left behind" would learn quickly that even as a minority in America, their position is greatly favored compared to any other group.

Scripture, however, invites us to something more. In the Word of God, we find that our motivation to love others is not based on pity or situational empathy. Instead, as followers of Christ, our motive to love others is because God, through Christ, first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Understanding this truth provides compassion for others, not from situational pity or past systemic racism but based on what Scripture instructs:

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

*1 John 4:19-20*

## Summary

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While I've never met Tony Evans, his work in the ministry, as far as I can observe, is exemplary and should be commended. While I disagree with his approach in this area of ministry, he has labored for decades to do what he believes will honor God. In that regard, he has my utmost respect.

However, the ideas that serve as the foundation of *Kingdom Race Theology* are dangerous and destructive. When paired with the challenges evident within the SBC, this work will take Southern Baptists in a dangerously leftward direction. KRT lacks biblical definitions of anthropology. It applies partiality to ethnic hatred—assuming that only whites (the group with power) can express racism. And while Evans distances himself from CRT, his version of Kingdom Race Theology embraces all of CRT's problematic presuppositions. The one exception is that Evans promotes the idea that America, while filled with systemic racism, is not all bad.

Evans pays lip service to the importance of the gospel while committing his followers to the work of anti-racism (in racist systems), admonishing them that a lack of commitment in this area is akin to a violation of the “law of love.”

I believe Evans to be completely sincere in his approach to this issue. However, at the age of 72, it's essential to recognize that Evans lived during the era of Jim Crow. As a result, many of his presuppositions on these matters have been formed in experience rather than by Scripture. None of this is his fault. However, regarding racial reconciliation, I'd encourage Evans to complete the work of biblical reconciliation in his own life before writing and teaching how others should do it.

Author

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