



**SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE**

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**TITLE: An Interview with Kevin Lewis, Pt. 2**

NC: Hey, today I am here with special guest, Professor of Theology and Law at Biola University, Kevin Lewis. Kevin, thank you for joining me and our listeners today.

KL: Hey, thanks for having me on, Nat.

NC: Kevin, okay, I know who you are, but some of our listeners maybe didn't hear the last episode. Can you just give a little brief bio about who you are and what you do?

KL: Yeah, sure. I'm Professor of Theology and Law, at the Christian Apologetics, and Science and Religion program, at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. I'm also president of a nonprofit, called the Institute for Theology and Law. And just bottom line, is for about the last 30 years, I just have loved training people in Bible theology, apologetics, polemic integration into theology and law. You name it. Those are my passions.

NC: Great. Well, I went through the program at Biola. I graduated in 2015. By far, from what I can tell, it's the best apologetics program out there. [That's correct.] It is. I learned a lot. I thought a lot, I grew a lot, and what's great about it, is I've got connection to some of the best professors on the planet, still to this day. But I have got a notion that there are many listeners today, who go, "Okay, I've heard of apologetics, but I don't know what it is." So what is apologetics and why should Christians care about it?

KL: Yeah. Thanks for the question. Apologetics is fairly simple. It comes from a Greek word *apologia*. That simply means a reasoned defense. And so we think about when people attack the Christian faith, that what we're supposed to do is to command, always be ready to give an answer, or a reason, for the hope that lies within you, with gentleness and respect. That's the *apologia*; that's the reasoned defense, but it's also - remember it's not just apologetics. There's a whole lot of disciplines that weave into sort of this very broad category of apologetics. There's also, what's classically called polemical theology. The Greek word *polemos* means to battle or to war. And that means that the false ideas that are out there, we attack them. We don't just respond to attacks. We actually attack false views. And this is Titus 1:9 as well, where it commands, that if you're going to teach in the church, anyone that is called to a position of eldership is supposed to be able to teach, is supposed to be trained enough to be able to both *exhort in sound doctrine* - that's what we call positive theology: here's a positive presentation of the truth - but then secondarily, Titus 1:9 says, and *refute those who contradict*. [Yes]. Refute doesn't mean disagree. It means to prove that they are wrong. That's what a refutation is. So the problem is -

and in my syllabi, I've got dozens and dozens of warning passages – that say, the false prophets are in among you; be on the alert.

You look at Second Timothy 4:1-5 (ESV). I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead...: **2**preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. **3**For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, **4**and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

And then it goes on to say: **5**As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist... (Vs. 5a) So the fact is we're, we're commanded throughout Scripture to be aware and discerning of the false teachers that come within the church, because God's people from the beginning have always had the false prophets coming in amongst us, and telling us to go after other gods and other gospels. That hasn't changed in the church era, and it hasn't changed in the modern era. Hence, when you look at how the church always falls, it always falls from within. It falls because we have someone who doesn't believe the Bible, getting the reins of power, in our academies, our universities, our seminaries, and in our churches. And they pretend to be Christians. They pretend to believe the Gospel. They use the same language we use. They talk about God, Christ, Jesus, Bible, all of that. But it's the same words, but it's a different dictionary. [Yes]. So that's why we're called to be discerning about these things.

NC: Okay. So you've heard this before. I know you have. It's really popular today for Christians to say, or, you know, people, just to say, “Hey, all that really matters is Jesus. Right? As long as you’ve got Jesus, you're good” or “It's all about love”. Okay. So what do you say to those people? Because that seems to go against what you've just said.

KL: Well, that's because what I said was Biblical, so that's why it goes against what I just said. The problem is, you look at something like 2 Corinthians 11 (NASB), it talks about, you know, how *the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds would be led astray from... .. another Jesus... .. different spirit... ..or a different gospel which... ..you bear this beautifully.* (Vs. 3-4) And it says, the ones who are doing this are *false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.* (Vs. 13-14). So the fact is, that the Bible itself warns us that there are - I mean, Matthew 24 - warns us there are false Christs, that will be proclaimed. So when we look at just say 2 Corinthians 11, with Paul's statement, their different spirit, different Jesus, another gospel, exactly. A different Jesus - you look at the concept of Jesus Christ out there. Jesus is not just your buddy. See, there can be things we can say about Him that are true, but they're insufficient. Like He is a friend, but He's more than our friend. He is God Almighty, second person of the Trinity. He is our Savior and He is the judge, and He is the one to whom we give an answer. So Jesus is not - as the new-agers would say - you know, one of the many avatars; like the Mormons would say, He's not one god among bazillions and bazillions of gods, that is teaching you how to become one someday. He's not just a man, like the Muslims would say, who swooned on the cross. He's not a mere man, who's the best ethics teacher who ever lived, like the liberals would say. So yeah, it's when you say, “All you need is Jesus”, no, what that means is, all you need is the one mediator between God and man, and your commitment to His provision for forgiveness of sins. And if you're not repentant and committed to that, then you're going to have problems

with the real Jesus, when you finally need Him.

NC: Yeah. You answered that question so well, so I think I'm hearing you clearly then, that theology matters. And I know there are a lot of people who come to theology and say, "Well, I didn't go to seminary. I'm not a theologian. Look, I'm just an everyday person". And so they're really indifferent towards theology. Are you saying that Christians should not be indifferent towards theology, and why?

KL: Okay. Yeah. On that, for theology, again, theology and apologetics, they always have to go together. There's positive presentation of true theology. And remember, like every discipline you can study, there's a lay level that everyone should know about. And then there's the level for the people who are the leaders and the learned. People should know enough about their own medical care to be able to know what pills to buy at the supermarket. Okay. And then a doctor, a trained medical doctor, knows a heck of a lot more about it. Okay. Same thing with lawyering. Okay. The average person should know enough about the law to keep themselves out of trouble and follow it. And at the same time, they're not lawyers or law professors; [Well said] same thing with doctrine in the church. There is a level of doctrine that every Christian needs to know, period.

Why? Because just forget the word doctrine, or theology, and substitute the word, truth. Okay. What truths do we need to know about God, Christ, salvation, the Spirit? How to live a good and holy and sanctified Christian life? How to be blessed? Those are truths that we need to know. So we seek those truths through the Scripture, but what's the problem? There are quote/unquote, competing truths. They're the true truths that we need to know. In other words, truth I'm using in the correspondence sense; of truth is a property of propositions that correspond to reality. In other words, if our ideas correspond with a mind independent world, then they're true. Okay. So the fact is, there's all sorts of lies that don't correspond to a mind independent world, that people think are true. And that's why this is so important. So if you don't like the word theology or doctrine, fine, use the word truth.

So why is that so important? How about this? How did the entire sin problem with the human race begin? Go to Genesis Three: It began with a lie. See, the fact is, that the devil told Eve a lie, and she believed the lie. And because we're wired in the image of God to have appetites for the things that we think are good, true, and beautiful, because we think that's what makes us happy. So the problem is, is that we tend to believe, that "Okay, well, is it true?" Well, if your heart's bad, you know, you're going to want to believe things that you think are going to make you happier. Well Eve decided, that when God says, "Okay, the day you eat the fruit, you shall surely die". The devil says, "No, you won't surely die. The day you eat of the fruit, your eyes will be open and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil." - why was that so attractive? Well, number one, "Oh, wait, God lied to me. I'm not actually going to die. "B" - your eyes will be open - "Wait. God's keeping important truths from me that are preventing my full happiness." "C" - "You'll be like God, you won't be under authority anymore. You will be your own authority. You decide for yourself what to know, what good and evil is." So it's the call to rebellion, and for you to decide what actually promotes the most happiness, and the problem is, we found out, "Wow, what do you know? You believed the lie that you thought was true, and it resulted in misery." So the fact is, is God is God. The world is the way it is. Human beings are the way they are.

Morality is the way it is. Just like the law of gravity, the way it is, you can invent some new idea about the law of gravity. And if you're wrong, guess what? It's not going to work out well for you. And that's what happened with atheism, paganism, polytheism and you name it. You invent false systems of theology, where you have a false god, false morality, false views of redemption. What you end up with is misery, and you end up with eternal conscious punishment as a result.

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NC: Joining me today is Professor of Theology and Law, Kevin Lewis. From your perspective, what is essential Christian doctrine, and how do we know it?

KL: First question. When you think about what is a central Christian doctrine, you have to think about, well, what are the divisions of doctrine? And there are plenty, but when you say essential, what you're really saying is, what's necessary? And then the other things we might talk about, is things that are, you know, non-essential or secondary, but non-essential doesn't mean not important. And then there might be third level types of doctrines, where they don't really affect how you live your daily life one way or the other, but, you know, they might be useful for regulatory principles, or something of that nature. So we start with, what is essential. In other words, what makes Christianity Christian, and gives it its particular identity?

So that's what I call in my class, a systemic minimalist approach. We're looking for the least or minimal number of truths that one has to believe and adhere to, to say, this is the Christian religion as distinct from Islam. So those things are normally what you would find on sort of your general fundamental evangelical church doctrinal statement: We believe in inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. We believe in the Trinity. We believe in the full deity and humanity of Christ. We believe in the lostness of mankind, and spiritual death of mankind. We believe in the Incarnation of Christ. We believe in His virgin birth, His Resurrection, His full atonement for sin, and that by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone, one can be saved - and add to that, you know, a couple other things - you know, Christ is going to come back to judge the living and the dead, and so on and so forth.

Those are the basics of a central Christian doctrine. And so that defines Christianity as Christian. Muslims aren't Trinitarians. Muslims don't believe in the deity of Christ. There's going to be some overlap with other world religions, like Christians are monotheist and Muslims are monotheist, but Christians are Trinitarian monotheists. So that's what distinguishes Christianity from other world religions, even though there are other religions that are monotheistic. So think about what's unique and identifying to making Christianity Christian, as a system. And that's what's essential.

But then secondarily, within that system of doctrine, there's also a subset of doctrines that, you know, you don't have to go through a doctrine class at a church to get saved. The fact is, there's some pretty minimal things people have to believe, to get saved. And that's where you see some of these minimal Gospel messages that you see in Scripture, like in Acts 2 and Acts 10, where in the same passage, it's being preached and people are getting saved, like: Christ has come. He died for sins. He's the Messiah. He's the judge of the living and the dead. He paid for your sins. He came back from the dead, and anyone who has faith in Him will have their sins forgiven. Both Acts 2 and Acts 10, you see people saved in the same passage, with that Gospel message preached. They didn't understand the Trinity. They didn't understand a lot of these other things,

but they committed to a basic Gospel message. And then secondarily, one who does commit to that - where'd that Gospel message come from today? It comes from the Bible. So that's going to point you to these other systemic truths about the Christian faith that define it. So that's essential or necessary Christian doctrine, which everybody needs to know. If you're going to be minimally a Christian, you need to have a minimal knowledge of Christian doctrine, at least at a lay level. You don't have to know Greek and Hebrew and philosophy, and everything else that the leader should know.

But then secondarily, these are things that are not necessary to defining what Christianity is or Salvation, but they're very important. So these non-fundamental, or secondary doctrines, are things that a church is going to divide over, because they have to do with the practice of Christianity, not what it is. So for example, one clear example is church government, okay? You can't have an Episcopalian and Congregational form of church government in the same church at the same time. [Right] You have to pick one; you've got to run the church. You can't have anarchy in the church. People say, "I don't like organized religion". Well, "Do you like disorganized religion?" The fact is, is that, yeah, you need structure. You need administration, you need these things, but you can't have competing views. Other secondary stuff, that doesn't affect Salvation: take the issue of tongues and sign gifts in the church. If you're going to a church that's a cessationist church, you think tongues and sign gifts have ceased, that they're only for the apostolic era, to confirm the Gospel. How do you interpret tongues breaking out in your church? As a demonic manifestation, or somebody trying to get attention. Okay. So that's something that's going to be quelled in practice. If you're at a Pentecostal church, they're going to say, "No. Tongues are an example of God revealing stuff to us". Or if you're in a First Wave - as they call it - Pentecostal church, tongues are going to be the initial evidence of the second baptism with the Holy Spirit. So it's something everyone should seek. That's why real Christians disagree on some of these very important things. That's why those secondary things are so important.

And then third level doctrine is stuff they call indifferent or *adiaphoros* stuff, which is okay - even though it can devolve into pretty weird stuff. But like, spiritual warfare - what's the best way to get rid of demons? Okay. You can have a robust debate in a local church on what the best way to get rid of demons is, or, you know, the way to do spiritual warfare. Pastoral staff - you know, someone comes levitating into the church, spewing out pea soup and speaking backwards in Latin - you know, they get together in a huddle and say, "Okay, whoever casts out the demon wins. Okay. You had the best spiritual warfare method. Let's see which one is best". Even that, there's objective Biblical truths for that. But the point is, that's something you can disagree on in a local church, and still have functional harmony in the local church.

NC: Right. Okay, that's a great summary of those three different levels, but I've got a question. Can those secondary things, or I mean that third tier, move up, because think about church history: we've had these different councils and these moments in time, where the church was trying to combat heresy and false teaching. I mean, I would think even over the last 40 years, where we've had kind of a few unique moments - like where the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy came about, or the Nashville Statement on Human Sexuality - those are unique moments in church history where they said, "No, no, no." Again, we need to come back and say, this is essential. So can those secondary issues, or issues that are becoming divisive, do those move up? And if so, I mean, are these valid examples?

KL: Great question. You've got to think about, we back up to, we just talked about three levels of doctrine, but to do that, we have to think about what's heresy and orthodoxy, and what it really means to have a doctrinal statement, or create confession or rule of faith, and why we have those. Because the whole point of having a doctrinal statement, is by their very existence, is that hopefully wise people are - and if you're doing this at a local church level - you're saying we're putting in our doctrinal statement, all the things we need to agree on, not only to have a true Christian Church, but to have a harmonious functioning local body. Now you say historically, you have things like the Nicene Creed, the Chalcedonian Creed and the Apostle's Creed; those were more generically - those weren't as much for practice in the local church - those are for, what is Christianity. See, that's the systemic approach to that in essential doctrine.

The problem is, that you don't have Christian unity after really the fifth century, where we start seeing divisions. So after that, we really don't have Christian leaders thinking through every essential area of Christian doctrine and taking a position on it. You end at the fifth century, with a true universal or ecumenical statement on these things, with who Christ is, at the Council of Chalcedon. Now, had the church continued to work together, you would probably have a statement on sinfulness, the doctrine of the atonement, like we saw in the Reformation. That's where we saw, with the Protestant confessions, and creeds, these very clear, well thought out statements, on justification by faith alone, grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone. So arguably, we would have those set out in church history, and the ecumenical creed, had the church stayed together as a whole, instead of dividing, but to come back - I guess it's a good full circle here on the fact that - full circle, our worst enemies are in the church.

The fact is, is you don't get liberal Muslims and liberal Buddhists. And, you know, generally, you've got divisions of Islam, like Sunnis and Shiites, but you don't get the kind of false prophets that we get in the church. So people who hold false views come into our church, introduce these false views. And that's the heresy, that's the divide that they create, by suggesting, or teaching in these false views, within a community that has already adopted these statements of truth. You know, if we say, God is Triune, someone comes in and teaches Modalist Monarchianism, that God's only one person, that appears in three different modes or forms, see that causes a faction or a heresy in the church. The problem though, is that, see, now we've got, flash-forward, Post Reformation, from the 16th century, we have Protestantism and Protestant Orthodoxy, which continues. 18th century, Post-Enlightenment, we start to see Liberalism or Modernism affecting a good portion of the Protestant church. So we have 18th, 19th through the 20th century, Modernism guts most of the Protestant denominations. 20th century, we have the doctrinal Fundamentalist renewal, of which Biola was one of the initial ones, to restore a central Christian doctrine to Protestantism.

Later, that becomes, in the Post World War II period, the Evangelical movement, because the doctrinal Fundamentalism - after actually the Scopes trial in the 1920s - is actually a key issue for that. People start saying, well, somehow Christianity can't compete in academia, because now that we've gutted all our universities - Harvard, Yale Princeton - which were once Christian universities; now they are a bunch of Liberal universities, and not Christian. So there's a cessation of engagement in scholarship and other disciplines, so we start Bible colleges, you know, which were great Bible colleges, but we stopped teaching people how to be Christian doctors, lawyers, politicians. We didn't run the law schools, medical schools and those anymore.

So we see culture failing at that point, because Christians aren't informing it. I mentioned sphere sovereignty - we talked about the family, the church and the government - the family is one of the main human institutions that God created for human flourishing. So when that goes bad, human flourishing decreases.

NC: Well, Kevin, our time is up, but you've given us just so much good information and truth. And if I could summarize our time together today, it's theology matters. Truth is the Bible. Let us, as Christians, gather around God's Word; hold fast to it. And as Christians – Hey, I hate to steal it - but let's go back to the Bible. Kevin, thank you for spending time with us today.

KL: Great to be here, brother. Thank you.