

Doing Theology: Part 2 - Karen Ellis

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 March 2024

Preacher: Karen Ellis

[0 : 00] Well, good morning. So what does this have to do with Black History Month from last month was just one of the questions that we had after the session. There were a couple of others. Another one was, what does this mean for New City? Another question that came up was, what does this look like on the ground in my everyday life? And this is probably my favorite comment was, I'm not going to tell you who it came from, but can you say it again and not use the big words?

Which tickled me. So I get all those. And so I'm going to try and, you said that to me. Okay. So we're going to try and answer all those questions today and kind of break some of those down because we ran out of time last time. Isaiah, if we can have that first slide up, please. I know the font is really small, but I'm going to read through these. There are five things we're going to take away from today. Okay. And what this sister is doing is a really good idea. She's taking a picture of the slide because then you can do the two finger thing and blow it up and have a look.

But these are the things we want to take away from today. And we're going to open each one of these points up and then I'll put the slide back up at the end and you'll go, okay, these are the things I'm going to walk out the door with. So the first thing is, okay, so big word, our epistemology, epistemology, which is just a fancy word for what God says about himself, what he's revealed about himself to us in nature, what he's revealed about himself to us in scripture. And I know for a lot of us, a lot of this is review. So we're probably not going to tell you anything you don't already know, but we're going to help you think about it in a different way, maybe. So our epistemology, what God says about himself and our ethics, which is how we obey God, they should match.

Because what we think about God filters into our actions. Every decision that you see in the Bible that anybody makes is a decision between following God and following themselves. Everyone. It's a decision between life and a decision between death and destruction. And we see the implications of all those. Just because hard things and sinful things are reported in the Bible doesn't mean God approves them. Right? Retweet does not equal endorsement. Right? It doesn't mean he endorses those things.

He's just telling you, these are the consequences that these people suffered for choosing this way. And these are the blessings that these people received for choosing my way. Okay? So our ethics and our epistemology, they're supposed to match when you follow Jesus. Now, Carl called them side A, how we, how, side alpha, how we think about how God has revealed himself to us. And side B, beta, side beta. How, thank you. Keep me right now. Try not to use the big words. Side beta is the, uh, the ethical side. When they match, the second thing we want to take away from today.

[3 : 51] When they match, when they overlay, we move from discussing alpha and beta to discussing alpha and omega. Because he's the connection that makes them match. So that's how we're moving from the alpha beta beta conversation. Now, why do we need to think about them as alpha beta? Because, point three, because of our human nature, oftentimes in history, the people of God have separated them.

We separate how we think about God from how we obey God. Fourth thing we want to remember is God has given us ways to keep the two together. And we're going to expound on six of them based on alpha and omega. And then the last thing we want to walk out remembering is that these ways that he's given us make us look different from all the other cultures in the world. We're not a counterculture.

I'm going to go into all of that. But we become a different kind of people when we walk out that door because we are living God's thoughts. We are living God's character. We are making choices based on how God has ordered his universe, not how we think it works to suit our own desires. Okay? So let's dig in. Okay. The first point is that our epistemology, what God says about himself, and our ethics, how we obey God, should match. What Carl calls the alpha, he was describing as

coming to us through propositions. We would say in our circles, through doctrine. That's what we teach in seminary. We teach doctrine. In the practical theology department, we teach the ethics and how they come together. This is what God has revealed about himself and what we believe God. It comes through the mind. Our minds got messed up in the garden. But then he tells us when we realize we believe he is who he says he is, he says, be transformed by the renewing of your mind because it matters.

Yes. The first lie, the first proposition that was not of God came through the garden when the serpent said, took what God's word said and made Eve doubt. Before she acted, before Adam acted, it started up here.

[6:37] So the mind matters. The thinking about God, the categories and category names that church history, the church fathers and the lay people and all the people who wrote about who God says he is, and they gave names to categories that we don't even see in the Bible. You won't find the word Trinity in Scripture necessarily, but the idea is there of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. So the doctrine matters. How we think about God matters. The information and knowledge that God has revealed about himself through his word, they matter. So we can't throw away good doctrine, good teaching, we would call it. On the other side, on the beta side, we have ethics.

What Carl called the beta. That comes oftentimes through the narrative. What were the people doing? How were they obeying God? It's not called the thinking of the apostles. The book is not called the thinking of the apostles. It's called the acts, the praxis of the apostles. What were they doing in response to knowing now that Messiah had come and fulfilled the promises? How were they moving forward? And we get some folks, like the seven sons of Shiva, we get some folks in the book of Acts as well, who were not thinking, who were not acting after God, but acting in their own self-interest. And so we get their consequences.

So the stories of the Bible matter. What did this have to do with Black History Month? I'm glad you asked. The oral tradition was often passed down through, in the African-American tradition, was often passed down through stories. They weren't in seminary. They weren't reading the early church fathers. They were living the book of Acts in real time. They didn't have Acts. They were denied access to the Bible. But God had revealed himself that he is and had revealed his hope to them.

And so they were living on the beta side of things, through the narratives, through a people who didn't always have their propositions worked out. But they knew that God was, God is, God will be. They knew that God is, and they knew that he had a way of living that needed to be satisfied through their obedience, through their exercise of hope. Let's think about the days even before. This is not unique in history. The slave experience is not unique. The Christian slave experience, much like the days before all the great and humble minds got together and by the Holy Spirit declared what books were true and reflective of the character of the mission of God, before the canon was formed, was formed. What existed? Well, we had the first five books. We had the prophets.

[10:04] What existed before that? God had written his law on people's hearts. So he's always been telling us how to think about him and how to be obedient to him. He's always been telling us. He's never left us without a side alpha and a side beta. We're going to break that down a little bit more.

On the side alpha side, he's revealed himself through nature to tell us that he is. We call that natural revelation or general revelation. So we know he is. But then he's spoken of himself to us and told us that we're separated from him and that Christ is the way back. That's the special revelation.

He's told us that there's a way to be obedient to him as we navigate a new life in him. So here's the kicker. Carl had, he had side A, side alpha on one side and side beta on the other side. And then he had this gradation of life in the middle. We're supposed to have both. We're supposed to be in the middle, in that part where the two overlay. What you believe about God will determine how you obey him.

So we live in this culture now, in our modern culture, we live in this time that's been heavily influenced by a false binary thinking. There's true binary, male, female, evil good. But there's false binary too that wants us to believe that either side alpha, the heavily cognitive side, is the only way. Or the heavily beta side, the ethical way, is the only way. The culture is even teaching us, so this goes to our question about what does this mean for New City, the culture is even teaching us that because the side alpha side is European and from the European tradition, it's wrong. The culture is

also teaching us, reverse that, that because the African-American tradition has been heavily beta side, it's wrong. Both of those approaches are wrong.

That's not realistic. It's not biblical. And people are more complex than that. We've been trained to think. We've been pulled into thinking, I would argue. We've been pulled and manipulated into thinking simplistically without our even knowing it. So we can use this as an opportunity to reorient ourselves to a biblical understanding. So the point of the alpha beta model that Carl was talking about is not that one is more right than the other. The point is that they work best together.

[13:23] When they overlay, when the narrative and the doctrine, the truth about who God is and the ethics, how we obey God, work together. The alpha and the beta work together. So in other words, our thinking and our doing must go together. God intends for them to go together.

As the old people used to say, say you ought to match, do. Y'all ever heard anybody say that? Your say you ought to match, you do. What we say we know about God should match how we obey God. Okay. In our context, the next point is when ethics and epistemology match, when they overlay, we move from discussing alpha beta to alpha omega. In our context, it has divided racially. Cognitive versus intuitive. We exist in a denomination that asks for, before a man can be ordained, he has to get a college degree and then go to seminary and then stand in front of the presbytery and give answers to what he knows scripture has revealed about God.

That's super cognitive. But we also have the church planter assessment that Y and Shirley are involved in. A number of our leaders, Kevin and Sandra, are involved in where they check your praxis. They check how, well, how do you live? So we see the side alpha and the side beta there, right? So, but in other contexts, they're divided along other lines. We just had, I don't know if you guys remember James Williams. He was James and Barbara Williams. They were interns here at New City years ago.

And we just saw them yesterday. They're doing really well. And they just, they've been doing a really neat work in India. And they're finding commonality in the African-American experience with the Dalit class of people who were at the bottom of society. And the Dalits in India are experiencing some of the most amazing revival and turning towards Christ. And so they're, they're really looking at, okay, what is it about being in the, in that, that low cultural position that, that makes the, makes the scripture pop, makes God come alive and makes people hungry for an identity that satisfies completely opposite what the culture says they are, that elevates them and their awareness of themselves because they're different in Christ. So in India, the church can sometimes be divided by, not by race, but by class. According to the social structure that's around them, the Brahmins are at the top.

[16:28] The Dalits, and it's literally considered a, the body of the deity. The Brahmins are at the top. The Dalits are lower than the feet. They're on the margins of society. The Brahmins are often the highly educated and they run everything. They're, the Dalits are largely unschooled laborers. It's not that the Dalits aren't intelligent. It's not that they're not smart, but the stories of scripture appeal to them because they recognize it as their story. They feel Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when they say, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God. It's not that they don't need the doctrines of the faith. They do. They need the cognitive. They want the cognitive. If anybody wants to go and do some teaching, I will hook you up with James and Barbara. They will be delighted to take you.

It's not that the Dalits can't learn them. They most certainly can, but they are the outcasts. They are called literally the untouchables. And that's where the revival is breaking out.

So because they're a heavily, you know, beta ethically oriented group, even as they're focusing on doctrine and training their leaders, they have to train them through the orality method.

They're not opening up books. They're, they're, they're unschooled people. Their literacy level is low. So they're using the orality method. Funny thing about the orality method. It's now really popular in UK, in the United Kingdom, because the literacy rate is so low among the British and the Irish and the, and so now the educated Nigerians and West Africans are coming and training leaders in the church using the orality method with the Europeans. How's that for an English reversal?

What is the orality method? The orality method of scripture is, it's a method that was created for places with low literacy rates. So you, you focus on the narratives of scripture and you ask, you ask questions, basically that connect side alpha and side beta. You go through the scripture hearing, you talk about it in a group, and then you walk outside, you live it for a week, and then you come

back and you discuss where you saw the scripture come to life.

[18 : 57] That's, that's a, I mean, it's really, it's more complicated than that, but that's it in a nutshell. So it's not based on study, study, study, study, study, read, read, read, because they don't, they don't have those skills yet. So that's an interesting twist on, on the, the, the use of the narrative and the, and the, the, the cognitive together. But what's interesting in, in, in that context is what is setting them apart and the church where the, the cognitive and the, the, the intuitive or the narrative meet together, where the alpha and the beta sides join, is that, um, among, as they exist as Christians among the Hindus and the Muslims and the Hindu nationalists and even the non-religious and the atheists, uh, and the Buddhists, is when, when the highly cognitive Brahmins in the church and the story-driven Dalits come together, they defy society's norms.

And their ethics and their epistemology, their alpha and their beta, their think and their do, match. And it makes them look different from everybody else. So how they believe God and how they obey God as they work together, they become a witness. That's why they need to be together. So you see, we need both ways of approaching scripture, just as we are one in the body. And these two ways of looking at scripture can't be separated without penalty. Any more than the body of Christ can be separated without penalty. Any more than any covenant commitment can be separated without penalty. Because God has made one new man out of a multinational people. And he, for his purposes, allows each of our cultures to bring something to understanding who he is.

Different cultures have brought different things to understanding the gospel in any given time. And they always bring, this is not my teaching, this is somebody else, uh, but they always bring something beneficial and they always bring, because of our human sin, they always bring something off and detrimental. But because of who God is, he keeps the kingdom line going this way.

[21 : 40] Think about the Jews in the, okay, the Jews in the New Testament, they've got, they've got the, they've got the, they've got Moses, they've got the prophets, they've got the Torah, they've got the, you know, the, they, they, they, and then here comes Jesus and he's the, he's the fulfillment.

And then the Greeks are like, oh boy, we like Jesus too. And the, and the Jews are like, okay, great, come on in. You know, after a couple of little, you know, hesitations, they're, they're, they're like, come on in. A few bumps and bruises along the way. They're like, okay, this is for everybody. This is, you know, we're, we're one new man in Christ. And then, and can you imagine the Greeks come in and they're like, well, we've got propositions. We're a Socratic people.

But they bring categories. And can you imagine, I'm sure the Jews were like, guys, that's not what Moses meant. You're misunderstanding this thing. If the Jews had known that they would only, in terms of history, that the Jews would only be carrying at that moment, the gospel, you know, to the rest of the world for like that long in history, but they had no idea. So then come the Greeks, then become the Byzantines. And they bring us this idea of family and kinship because that God had embedded that in their culture. And so they're like, wow, we see this and this is important.

And, and it's on and on and on and on through all the people who have held and enculturated the gospel. Every culture holds the gospel for a minute and passes it along and brings something, something valuable that helps us understand it better. And that's a move of God. So how we obey God, just to finish up with this slide, because we want to focus on the alpha and the omega who makes this right. How we obey God, it's not even just how we obey him. It's the power to obey him. All that he has told us about himself, our ethics and our epistemology, the alpha and the beta, the thinking and the doing are connected by the person of Christ. The marriage between the two happens through Christ. And that way we become the witness of Christ. And in him, we move from alpha beta to alpha omega. I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Revelation 22, 13. Revelation 1, 8. I am the alpha and omega, says the Lord, who is, who was, and who is to come. The almighty in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He's the one who laid this plan. We should go to him to understand how does your universe work?

[24 : 28] That was the doctrine. That was the witness. That was the revelation Adam and woman were receiving from him in the garden directly from him. He said, let me tell you how this world works. I made it.

Yeah. Yeah. All right. Say a word. He's going to get me excommunicated. He's going to get you excommunicated. All things were made through him. And we're not recording this, are we? All things were made through him. And without him was not anything that was made. He said to me, it is done. I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end of the thirsty. I will give from the spring of water of life without payment. I could go on and on. You guys know the scriptures. It's chock full of the fact that he has covered us from the, he has covered us, created us for himself from the foundation of the world, has promised to keep us in spite of ourselves all the way to the end and equip us not just to give us new bodies to live in the, in the sweet by and by, but he's given us what we need in these broken bodies to live in the nasty now and now. And we're supposed to do it together.

Okay. The next slide, because of human nature, we separate how we think about God and how we obey God. Bad things happen in history when we separate the two and we do not leave a good witness.

We leave damage. We leave toxic waste. We saw, okay, again, what does this have to do with Black History Month? We saw this with slavery. We see it around the world with classism. We see this around the world with exploitation and the church's involvement in it. The most egregious example of the separation of thinking about God and obeying God that I can think of is one of the most famous castles in Ghana's dark episode of slavery. It's called the Cape Coast Castle. And I know some of you have been there.

Um, the Cape Coast Castle began as a trade lodge constructed by the Portuguese in the mid 1500s on part of the Gold Coast, um, which later became known as the Cape Coast. But they had, uh, they had, um, at any given time, they had up to a thousand male or 500 female slaves shackled and crammed in the castle's, um, uh, dungeons. No space to lie down, very little light, exactly what you would expect from conditions like that. No water, no sanitation, the floor littered with human waste, um, people falling seriously ill as they waited for up to three months to be shipped from the Gold Coast to the New World.

[27 : 33] Um, the castle had these confinement cells, a solitary confinement cell, uh, for prisoners who were revolted or who were seen as rebellious, um, dreadful conditions.

In a harsh contrast, above ground, there were beautiful, extravagant chambers. Uh, no stench, no misery, uh, parquet floors, uh, where the British governor and the officers' quarters were spacious, airy, beautiful views of the waters of the Atlantic and a chapel.

Built above ground over all that human misery. Now imagine you go to church in the morning and you're singing the hymns and you can hear them moaning. You can hear humanity while you're worshipping God. That's what happens when we separate what we know about God, what God has revealed about himself from how we obey God, completely detached from the suffering that was going on right underneath the floor. So I hope that answers a little bit of that question. What does this have to do with Black History Month? It really matters that our ethics and our epistemology or our say and our do match.

slide six, uh, the next slide, please. Thank you. Mercifully, God has given us, he didn't leave us on our own, he's given us some ways to keep the, the two together and we're going to discuss, uh, six of those. First, we magnify our first loyalty.

That's what we're doing today. That's what we come to church to do. That's what all of our, our leaders and pastors here do every Sunday. They magnify Christ. Because if we don't start there, nothing good will happen.

[29 : 55] And then we magnify Christ and we magnify, that magnifies who we are in him. And I'm going to get to that in a second. We magnify why we're here. We are a unique people with a unique mission. We have a unique story. Nobody else in the world, no other ethnicity, no other culture, no other, um, uh, club, social club has the story that we have.

We rehearse that story whenever we take the sacraments, whenever we take communion, we rehearse that story. When we see a baptism, we rehearse the life, death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus Christ. And we should be thinking when we hear on the night he was betrayed, we were like, that's my story. That's my story. And we should be jealous of it when other people manipulate it and twist it into something that it was never meant to be. I have this story that I tell my husband and I, when we were having all the civil unrest, we went, uh, we, we, we liked to go to these political things and we were like playing both sides of the aisles. We were like, well, let's go see what the, what the progressors are doing. Let's go see what the conservatives are doing. So we

got invited to this, um, this, um, I don't want to call any names, but we got invited to this, uh, it was, it was a, it was a political action conference and it was heavily, um, it was heavily Christian nationalism, which we didn't know going in. We were like, oh, wow. Okay. Um, this is, there's a lot of Christian language in this, but it's really conflated with America as the savior. And so, you know, we went to some workshops and I was like, we went with some people, we were invited with some donors. And, um, so we were like, okay, what, where, where are we? What is this? And we're not recognizing this as the story of the people of God. Then we got to the Sunday, uh, event. Uh, it was a weekend thing. We got to the Sunday event and there was a pseudo worship service, 6,000 people.

And the assumption that everybody in that room was a Christian. And then they had the worship service and I looked at Carl and I was like, I told him, I said, I'm really struggling right now.

I'm really struggling. And then there was a pseudo sermon and then they took communion. And I said, that doesn't belong to you and it's out of place. That belongs to the local church.

That belongs to the people of God. No tape, no fencing of the table. No. And I said, and the arrogance to assume that every one of those 6,000 people was a believer. When people come to political associations for lots of different reasons, for lots of different agendas, I was offended and we left, we left a lot of money on the table, but I couldn't, I couldn't partake. I couldn't participate because that's my story. That's the story of my people. It doesn't belong to you. It doesn't belong to politics. It belongs to a different set of politics. I'm going to get to that in a second.

[33 : 34] It belongs to a set of politics where the government will rest on his shoulders and there will be perfect justice and perfect mercy and perfect administration. And we'll gather around his feet and his kingdom will have no end. That's where that belongs.

Okay. So that's the role of the sacraments is to remind us that we are a different people. That how we behave when we walk outside matters. Okay. Let's see. What does that mean for new city today?

Great. Great question. I'm glad you asked. New city should be a place where what we believe about God and how we obey God should match because this becomes our witness to the city.

last time we had started to scratch at some of the practical ways of living our reality. I'm sure you all have many more stories than I do and many more ways of approaching how you share who Jesus is outside of these doors. And I would love to hear them. If y'all want to come and share, we need to tell those stories to each other. Ooh, I had this opportunity the other day, but we have to, they have a scripture points to at least two. One is the observational witness.

Romans 1 18 and following. I'm not going to read it, but you guys can take a look at it. It says that he has revealed himself everywhere. He's embedded himself in creation. And so you see Jesus doing this when he's going around with the disciples, he's walking around with them and he's like, here's some wheat. Let me, let me rub this in. Let me show you this. And here's some for you. And here's some for you. And let me tell you about me and why this matters, right? He's using the things around him just to tell people that he is. You guys have hung out. You guys do this yourselves.

[35 : 33] You hung out with people who are, they're just really good at this. They're like, they'd be sitting in a traffic jam and you're like, and you get all the way up to the traffic jam and you get to the accident and you pass it by and you say a little prayer. And then the person next to you, usually an older person, they're like, just like sin in your life. It'll shut everything down.

It's like, that's true. That's an observational witness, right? That's what Jesus was doing when he was showing, when he, but then he gets to the propositions. When he gets to the sermon on the mount and he knows that they've been, they've, they've taken the word and they've twisted it and he corrects them. And he says, you have heard it said, but I say to you, this is what I originally meant. So he's using all these different ways of teaching and declaring who he is. And then we also have what I call the worship witness. Let y'all, let me tell you, we left out, we left out, out of the prayer retreat with the women. And I went home, wandered home with Elise Young. And then we, I got to my house and then somebody, I was talking on the phone with somebody, I was telling him, I was, oh man, I had this really, really great prayer retreat where, uh, this was just last week, a couple weeks ago, um, where, you know, the Lord just really magnified himself and it was really good. And I was talking to my friend girl on the phone and we were going through judges six together. And I got this knock at the door and I was like, who's knocking? So I said, wait, so come with me to the door. I'm like, somebody's at my door. I got to answer it. I go to the door and I open it and I see, and I said,

I looked at the girls and I said, are you girls from the Mormon church? And they said, yes, we are. And I said, come in, come in. I said, listen, I'm on the phone right now with my friend girl. And, um, we're talking about judges six. Y'all just sit there and you can, you can, you can listen in. I said, but we're good. We're going to just go finish up this Bible study and then I'll be able to talk to you. Now I do not know. I don't know the ins and outs of Mormon doctrine. I really don't. I'm not an apologist. I'm not an apologist, but I know who Jesus is. And so, and out of the overflow of that whole day of having been with the sisters in the morning and then talking with my friend girl and unpacking what the Lord had said at the prayer gathering, out of the overflow of just sharing and I could not stop talking about the character of Jesus. And they sat and they listened patiently.

And every time they came with their, you know, the way they had it and I, you know, I started to kind of put together their framework. And I know we use different terms. We use the same terms, but they mean different things. I just kept coming back to what I know. When I don't know what to do, I go with what I know to be true. All I knew in that moment was Jesus and the word of God does the heavy lifting. And all I had to do was magnify his name. I didn't have to go to an apologetics class. I didn't have to study Mormon doctrine. I just, because I didn't have time in that moment. I was like, Lord help. And he's like, just, just talk about me. Talk about who you know me to be, which is, I find out later, one of the sticking points. They have a totally different Jesus that they're following. So praise God, right? But these are ways where, these are the places where our ethics and our epistemology, what we know about God and how we obey God and how we tell others about him match. So that answers the question, what could this look like on the ground?

[39 : 19] God, declaring who he is and what he's done, his ethics and his epistemology in our lives.

Okay. Thinking and doing. So we live and teach others how to do practical things in God's framework, our worship witness, our worship witness, and our observational witness. But what happens when we do that? Next slide. What else does this mean for New City? The more our say and our do match, the more they overlay, the more our think and our act match, the more unique and the more other cultural and other political we become. And the more we accomplish the work of our unique call, and this was something that we were sort of starting to scratch at at the end of the last session, just by existing as the people of God when our ethics and our epistemology match. Why? Because there are things that the people of God who are obedient to God, there are things that we have to do, that we want to do, that we're called to do, that only we can do.

Only we can witness to Christ. Only we can love others as Christ does. Calling them the way that he calls them, sharing who he is, sharing the true transformational Christ who calls us as we are and then transforms us and changes us into what we were originally intended to be.

Correct and rebuke and reprove our surrounding culture just by walking out the door and existing. I think differently. Therefore, I am different.

[41 : 33] I don't use the words counterculture. I know a lot of people like to use that as, you know, but counterculture is really kind of tied to a particular time and place.

I feel like we are an other culture, other political reality. As we said earlier, a politics and a culture that's based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Not the counterculture of the 60s. We're not a culture, just another option. We are the option.

Because we follow Christ. And that's a bold thing to say today.

We are unique with a unique call, a unique presence, and a unique work. These are the things that we just talked about that give us that other cultural, other political shape.

And what happens is as we live who we are, as we live who he is, we become a culture that not only indicts, but it invites.

[42 : 41] And it says, it just doesn't leave the culture hanging. God didn't even leave Cain hanging. He didn't leave Adam and woman, Adam and Eve hanging. He was like, I got a ram in the bush.

He said to Cain before Cain murdered Abel, he said, it doesn't have to be this way. You know what you're thinking about. You can come back.

And he holds that same, we were all Cain once. And he holds that invitation to the culture outside to look at us and say, hmm, they really are a different people.

They really are set apart. What's that about? I want to go get me some of that. I don't like the way they do that. I don't like the way I feel all the time because it's causing me, asking me to do some hard things, make some hard decisions.

But I want more of that by the Holy Spirit. You know, I tell you, men are funny. Men love action.

And, you know, the way God has set this thing up, it has given men in particular a great opportunity

to do the book of Acts.

[43 : 56] You know, theology is not just about sitting and thinking about God. Theology is an action word. As Carl pointed out.

What's the definition? Say ought to match do. You can't have the do.

You can't have a proper do without a say. Can't have a proper say without a do. Or you shouldn't.

Okay. This is why it matters.

This is what makes us stand apart from every other culture. And there's going to be pressure because of that. People are not going to like it.

They're not going to like that we're different. But, you know, Romans 5, 1 through 5. 1 Peter 4, 12 to 19. Don't be surprised when the fiery trials come upon you.

[44 : 51] We're surprised every time. You're like, what? Wait a minute. And the Bible says, don't be surprised when the fiery trials come upon you.

There's a purpose to this. It's because you're different. When Paul, when we just heard Brother Albert McGowan gave a great message on suffering yesterday in Columbia, South Carolina at an HBCU gathering.

And he said, you know, when Paul met God on the Damascus Road, or when God met Paul on the Damascus Road, and the first thing he tells him, he's like a couple of days in, and he's like, by the way, you're going to suffer.

But it's going to be okay. You're going to change. You're going to suffer. You're going to live for me.

But it's going to be okay. This is normal Christian living. For some reason, God has allowed us to enjoy security and religious freedom for his purposes.

And I praise God for it. I'm grateful for the religious freedoms I have. But they're slipping away. I mean, it doesn't matter what happens really. Well, it does matter what happens in legislation.

[46 : 03] But the culture is really hostile towards Christianity more than it used to be. We're not considered a force for their idea of good.

But that's normal Christian living. And it's not our mercy ministry that separates and defines us as New City. It's not our unique New City history, as beautiful as it is, that separates and defines us. It's not our racial reconciliation reputation that separates and defines us. It's not our ministry in the inner city that separates and defines us. It's not the capacity of our outreach or our ministry, our mission efforts that separate and define us.

It's the uniqueness of who we are as the people of God that separates us and defines us from the rest of the culture. All of the other stuff is outflow.

It's byproduct. It's the do. But what defines us and sets us apart is the practice and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

[47 : 09] So I'll put the five back up on the board, the next slide. And you guys can take a picture of that. But I hope that we're at 950 now. And I hope that you guys, that helps you guys, answers a few of the questions that people walked out with and brings some clarity.

If I see Sam nodding, and I know it's okay. Is it all right, Sam? Did we do it? Okay. Answers some of our lingering questions. And you guys can email me or Carl if you have more questions.

We'll be happy to keep wrestling through this with you. We are wrestling through it ourselves and understanding what unique opportunities are now presented to us as a set-apart people.

In a culture that's very different than it was even just 10 years ago. There's a lot of opportunity out there now. They're not obstacles. They're opportunities. And we want to face them with joy.

We want to face them as one new man made in Christ. We want to pray together about the obstacles that we're experiencing.

[48 : 17] And we want to lean into our ethics and our epistemology, our say and our do matching, so that we can leave a good kingdom ball in the hands of the next generation.

Jason. Oh, okay. You've got nine minutes before the Super Bowl starts. Thank you. So you mentioned that there's a lot of pressure trying to define who we are.

How do as Christians lean against all these labels and identities trying to tell us, this is who you are, these are your privileges, this is what you can and can't do.

How do we become other when we have so much coming at us to tell us this is who you are, you're a minority, you're white, you're privileged, you're underprivileged, whatever the situation is, how do we just be Jesuses?

That's a great question. We know our story really well so that we can recognize false stories when they come. Because those are false narratives.

[49 : 26] It's not that ethnicity doesn't matter. Obviously, if John can look out at the Revelation and see the nation's tongues and tribes, obviously we get to retain some of that in glory.

I don't know how it works. So it's not that it's not important, but it's not ultimate. And I think for me, when anybody questions or comes to me and decides to make any earthly thing ultimate, that's a challenge to my ultimate loyalty.

So we have to know our story well. We have to know our scripture well. We have to teach ourselves and teach each other well what it means to be a set-apart group of people. We have to look through history and find those stories so that we can recognize and say, no, I can't go.

I can only go with you so far on that, brother. Yes, he just said so that doing theology isn't something that we just do to other people.

It's something that we do to ourselves. Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. Thanks, everybody. Happy Sunday. Thank you very much.

[50 : 51] Thank you. jewelry.