THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 103 | VFL Reads: *Six Ways Christians Can Respond to Our Strange New World,* Part 1

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Hunter Beaumont

FELLOWSHIP DENVER CHURCH

Autumn: Welcome to the Vision for Life podcast, an ongoing conversation between the pastors of Fellowship Denver and the church at large. Each week we talk about life, faith, the Bible, and how to follow Jesus as we go about our daily lives. I'm Autumn, the host of the podcast, and Hunter is joining me today. Hunter, so glad to have you here.

Hunter: Autumn, it's great to be back, and it's good to be here without having a cold and to be able to talk like myself. I listened to our interview with Philip Moore, and I sounded like what my grandma would call a dying calf in a hailstorm.

Autumn: I like your grandma's descriptions. I don't know if that's what you sounded like. I haven't listened back to that episode yet, but I'm glad you're feeling better today.

Hunter: If you think about the image, there's a calf, which is a fragile baby cow, and it's in a hailstorm, so it's getting pelted with hail and it's dying. That's just a moaning, wailing, really distressed sound.

Autumn: Yeah, that was a picture I don't know if we needed to unpack today.

Hunter: Well, you're from farmland, just trying to connect with you.

Autumn: Yeah, thank you. It's a realistic image, but still sort of sad. I'm glad you don't sound like that.

Hunter: Good to be back with my deep, impactful, resonant voice.

Autumn: Right. Well, today we are discussing an article that is posted on The Gospel Coalition's site, written by Carl Trueman. And the title of the article is *Six Ways Christians Can Respond to Our Strange New World*. A part of that title, *Six Ways*, is very clear. In it, Trueman offers six instructive suggestions for Christians that are incredibly helpful and thought-provoking, which is why we decided to discuss this today. But what does he mean by 'strange new world'?

Hunter: He means this modern world we're living in, which we talk about quite a bit on this podcast, this modern world we are living in that has been shaped by new notions of selfhood. Like how do I know who I am and how do I express who I am? How do I figure out who I am? New notions of selfhood, it's commonly called individualism or hyper-individualism. And he notes that these new notions of selfhood have created a whole new world that is strange in the sense that it's not like any culture that has gone before us. And for many of us—I'm somewhere in my 40s—let's just say I can even remember when the world didn't feel like it felt today like it feels today in terms of how intensely this culture we live in is being shaped by these new notions of selfhood.

We talked about some of that with our previous guest, Philip Moore, and we talked about how that's even having political consequences. Carl Trueman is helping us think as Christians how do we live out our faith in this kind of world.

Autumn: We've mentioned some of Carl Trueman's other work on the podcast as well, but really just in referential form. There's a book that you and I both, well, you read it first and then said, this book is incredible and helpful and enlightening, and suggested that many of us on staff would also find it to be so. So, after that, I read it. And that book is

called *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. This article references much of what Trueman's other work talks about, and so, in this new notion of selfhood, that book is a much larger volume on some of the same themes that he references here.

Hunter: In fact, he wrote a follow-up book to *The Rising Triumph of the Modern Self*, which was like a summary of it in shorter form. And that book is called *Strange New World*. And then the subtitle tells you a little bit of where his thinking is going. The subtitle of that book is *How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity*—like how we know who we are—*and Sparked the Sexual Revolution*. He sees the sexual revolution as one of the main ways that we see these new notions of selfhood expressed, or maybe the way that we see it most visibly in our world. But he's consistently making the argument that the sexual revolution is not "the problem," rather there's something underneath, that it'd be like a sickness, that the sickness itself is not the main thing. There's a deeper cause underneath it. Now, some of our listeners might go, I'm not sure the sexual revolution is a sickness. So, that metaphor might break down, or I'm not sure it's a problem. But Carl Trueman does see it as he's not pro sexual revolution; He sees it as a problem. But he's trying to help his readers understand that the problem is not the problem. The problem is much deeper than that. And most of his work focuses on what are the deeper issues underlying it. And so, he traces out histories of philosophy and theology and sociology and shows us how these new notions of selfhood developed over time. He's a great cultural historian in that sense.

Autumn: When we decided to discuss this article, I found myself, as I read and reread it, thinking, I don't know what we can do to actually help or add anything instructive to this. I think everyone listening should just go read the article. So, we're going to go ahead and discuss it anyway. But we decided to take this on in a two-part discussion. So, today we're going to talk through the first three of the points that he makes in this article.

Hunter: There's so much here that we just figured out it would be too long of an episode if we tried to discuss all six points at once. And so, we're going to break it down and we highly, highly, highly urge you to go and read this. And you might even need to read it in two parts. I had to read it and take a break in between and eat some skittles and come back and read a little bit more because it's substantial.

Autumn: Right, so the first of these first three points, so the first portion of this article, the first half of it that we'll discuss today and in it Trueman says, 'Recognize our complicity.' And by 'our' he is speaking to here, and in this whole article, Christians. So, Christians who are reading and encountering his ideas in this article recognize 'our.' So, our, being Christians', complicity.

Hunter: And he's making the point that our whole way of imagining what Christianity is and of practicing our faith has been heavily shaped by modern notions of the selfhood. And so, for example, one of the first points he draws out is that we tend to see 'me' or the 'I' as the locus or the focus point of true spirituality. So, he makes the point that this is biblical in a sense. And it's biblical in the sense that we are all called to make a personal decision about Jesus Christ and we're all called to have a personal response to the gospel. And so, there is a highly individual notion of what it means to be a Christian, and that is that I have personally made a decision. I wasn't just born into a Christian family, I'm not just socialized into a Christian church, but rather I personally made the decision to follow Jesus. And my own heart has been

what Jesus called 'born again;' it's been reborn. I've experienced that myself. So, in one sense it's very true; Christianity is a very individual and personal thing.

Autumn: I appreciate in this section of the article how he sets up this balanced perspective. So, he does point out, as you just mentioned, Hunter, that Christianity itself agrees with in some facets or to a degree some of the inherent ideas in expressive individualism. He says expressive individualism is correct in affirming the importance of psychology for who we are and in stressing the universal dignity of human beings, and moves on into saying what you reiterated there, only I can believe for me. And that places the 'I' in an important place. And we see that as necessary in allowing individuals to respond to the message of the gospel. And we've also noted that in that response it can actually, the response to the Gospel that is individual, can actually cause divisiveness within families or existing structures. So, it can have this individual sort of result, even; an individual response can generate these individual results. But that's only one part of this examination and one part of the understanding of the individual within the light of the Gospel.

Hunter: Theologically, the terms that would apply to this are new covenant and new birth. The new covenant was promised in the Jewish prophets and God promised that He would renew the hearts of His people. He would put a new heart within them. He would put a new spirit within them. He would cause them to walk in His ways out of a heart that desires to do, that not just kind of an external, this has been imposed on me from outside. So, Jesus then says you must be born again. And he gets that image from the Old Testament prophets, and he says this to a man named Nicodemus who would be a great example of what we might call socialized religion. And he was very moral, he was decent, he had been born into a Jewish family, and in all the ways that people would say, that's a good religious man, Jesus says, but you still need to have this inward new birth in order to enter into my kingdom. So, this is a very individual thing. Historically this has been emphasized in British and American Christianity through a movement called evangelicalism. And that term is probably familiar to our listeners, but they may not know the historical background of it. The term emerges out of revival movements in England and in the United States and the revival movements, sometimes called the Awakenings, the first and second Grand Awakenings. The emphasis of the revival movements was this: you must be born again. And the emphasis was given to people who had been "born" into a Christian family or into a Christian church as they were like they were church members; they were on the church membership role because my family's Presbyterian or my family's Congregationalist. And the revival movement emphasized just having your name on the roles because your family is a member and you were born into a Christian family, that's not what makes you a Christian in the original Jesus sense. What makes you a Christian is new birth. And so, the revival movements were a movement of people who have been socialized and born into Christianity experiencing new birth. And that was often through the preaching of people that were called revival preachers.

Those revival movements were divisive. I mean they were upsetting. They weren't divisive in the sense that they aim to be divisive, but they were unsettling to kind of the status quo. And those two movements were eventually called the evangelical movements. So, when we talk about evangelicalism in the historic sense, we mean the emphasis on the preaching of the gospel in a way that brings about new birth, and then what it means to work out the new birth in personal, individual lives. That's what evangelicalism historically is. I know it may mean something different today, but that's what it historically is. Today it might be thought of as a political movement, but historically it is a theological and spiritual renewal movement that emphasized the new birth and the working out of those implications. Carl Trueman is

an evangelical in that sense; I'm an evangelical in that sense, and he's pointing out that's good. And yet, that kind of evangelical emphasis that exists in a culture that has these new notions of selfhood can quickly become distorted where all the emphasis is placed on me and the 'I' such that we lose connection with the body of Christ or the fact that our faith is to be lived out within a body or within a church. And so, we only emphasize the personal, individualistic elements of it.

Autumn: Another way that I think that this idea that's inherent in both expressive individualism and in this heritage that we have in British and American evangelicalism is the definition of happiness and how our understanding of our individual selves and our individual fulfillment has become coopted even within the Church into a cultural notion of an understanding of the definition of happiness.

Hunter: And he brings that out as well. And he says we have defined happiness as an inner sense of psychological wellbeing. So, I know I'm happy because I feel happy. It's an inner sense, inward to me, that I'm okay. And he notes that that's different than the traditional Christian definition of happiness. Another word that shows up a lot in the Bible, I don't know if he brings this out in the article or not, is the word joy. You see it practiced a lot in the Psalms, and it's an acknowledgment of this is how I feel, this is my inward state, but this is what is objectively true about me and about God. And sometimes there's a gap between what I feel and what I'm experiencing and what is true. And when that gap exists, I lean into what is objectively true outside of me more than I lean into what I'm feeling and experiencing. And gradually, over time, my soul finds balance in knowing what is true about me, what is true about God, what is true about me in Christ. This is Christian joy. And he just notes that that's kind of been lost in this modern culture where really everything's collapsed in on, if I'm not feeling it, then I'm probably not happy. And what we're noting is true Christianity is, I can be feeling bad or feeling stressed and pressured, and yet I'm still okay because of who I'm in Christ. I literally had to give myself this conversation last night. I was feeling the stress about something. It was some stress I was picking up from other people, actually, who were asking questions, and they were anxious about it. And then I was like, well, I'm anxious now, too. And I literally was walking around praying, and I was reading Psalm 125, and the notion that came to mind is, hey, you're okay—trust God, your feelings are true in the sense that they are what you are feeling, but they're not telling you the whole truth about who God is and what can be the outcome of this. What does it look like to live by faith and to believe that God's actually going to show up and meet you in this? That's this in real life; he just knows that's gone. We've tended to define our happiness simply as, do I feel happy?

Autumn: So, he's saying a part of our complicity in this strange new world is that we tend to participate in the religious marketplace in a way that seeks our own individual happiness and fulfillment and that isn't living within the understanding of our individual self or actually the nature of happiness or joy that is true in the Bible and in the gospel.

Hunter: And you just said, 'religious marketplace,' which is kind of another idea he introduces here. So, if you kind of summarize it, he's saying we tend to see 'me' or 'I' as the focal point of true spirituality, and we tend to define happiness as, do I feel happy? And then we exist within a religious marketplace that gives us lots of lots of options. It gives us lots of options for churches, but it also gives us lots of options for spiritual practices. Even if you just say, I want to be a Christian, a Bible-reading Christian, you have a lot of options for churches to go to. You also have a lot of options for books to read, podcasts to listen to, including another option that we're putting out there into the world right now.

Autumn: We're complicit in the podcast production.

Hunter: We are complicit in the Christian industrial complex right here. This marketplace creates a proliferation of options, and people who are conditioned to think of 'I' as the locus of true spirituality and to define happiness as, 'do I feel happy?,' they will tend to just look for options that make them feel happy, and their commitment is only as deep as their happiness. So, if I'm in a church and now I don't feel happy in that church—maybe it's not quite my style, my personality—then I'll just assume I need to find a different church. If I read a book and it's not a book that really connects with me or speaks to me, then I'll just assume I just need to go find another book to read.
I've been listening to a podcast recently that's a Christian review of literature books. It's like Christians discussing great literary works. And I'm listening to one, they're discussing one of my favorite novels, and there's this one guest on the show that just keeps irritating me because all she does is talk about how she does not personally connect with the book because it doesn't speak to her experience. And I'm like, that's not the point of reading books.

Autumn: Trueman also offers—before we move on to his second point—he offers in this section his first point where he says, 'Recognize our complicity,' a suggestion as to how then we can do that, but then also what our response should be. So, he says first we need to examine ourselves individually and corporately to see in what ways we've compromised the gospel with the spirit of this age. Then we need to repent, call out to the Lord for grace, and seek to reform our beliefs, attitudes, intuitions and practices accordingly. Nothing less is required for a true reformation at this point, and this is a helpful directive to engage in self-examination in a way that brings us back into alignment.
I like how he says what he uses. There are attitudes, intuitions, and practices, that those are really shaped by the Gospel, even our understanding of ourselves and our happiness within ideas. They're really rooted and grounded in the gospel, in biblical truth.

Hunter: And I think practically, Autumn, that probably means things like this: I'm going to learn things that are true because they're in the Bible even though I don't feel like that's what I need to learn right now. I'm going to sit through church services that don't feel like they totally connect with me because this is what the body of Christ is focused on right now, and I'm going to trust the wisdom of the larger body of Christ. He gives an example of: how should you relate to a local church? And our point is not really to advertise 'stick with your church,' but he makes that point in the article. He says, 'You can't help but choose a church in this religious marketplace we live in.' We all have to choose a church. And he says, 'But having chosen the church, we can discipline ourselves to be committed to that church, to stick with it, and to refuse to allow ourselves to move on simply because of some trivial issue or matter of personal taste. This will be far from perfect and far from easy.' I like the honesty here. I notice that people who do that tend to have a joy and a balance and a depth to them that is uncommon in this world, and it's uncommonly beautiful and good.

Autumn: Let's move on to Trueman's second point. His second point is, 'Learn from the ancient Church.' And he takes some pains in the beginning of this section to define what he means by the 'ancient Church.'

Hunter: What does he mean?

Autumn: He means the first and second century.

Hunter: Okay, the real ancient church.

Autumn: Yes, the real ancient Church. As opposed to, he points out, looking back to the Church in the Middle Ages or the era of the Reformation.

Hunter: This was helpful to me because I love studying the Reformation era. And yet, there's one thing about the Reformation era that I can't totally relate to, and that is- I can relate to their theology. In fact, Martin Luther, who I've been reading a lot of this year and reading biographies of this year, Martin Luther experienced what we were just talking about in the first part of our conversation. He experienced the new birth. He had been socialized into Christianity to the point of becoming a monk and yet had not been born again. And he experienced new birth when he came to terms with the doctrine of justification by faith. I can totally relate to that, and I can learn a lot from his theology. What I can't as much relate to is Martin Luther lived in a German society where the church and all the official apparatus of the political culture, including the governor of the territory he lived in, they were all connected and they all worked together. Church and state were very closely aligned. This is sometimes called the 'high points of Christendom.' And we don't live in Christendom. We don't live in that kind of world anymore. And so, I can't as much relate to that and draw direct applications from how did Martin Luther engage his world when my world is structured differently than his world is. Carlton makes that point and he says, 'But if we go back to the ancient church-,' by which he means the second century, '-we actually can draw lessons because their world was structured similarly to ours, where Christianity was a minority and it was a maligned and misunderstood minority.' And more and more as we live in this strange new world, Christianity is not understood, and it's seen as bad for people and bad for our society. We have to do a lot of work to navigate that distance and it creates some discomfort.

Autumn: There are some other authors and writers in the last 40 years who have pointed out a similar sort of parallel and precedent. Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch both make the argument that our approach to bringing the gospel into a modern Western culture should actually mirror the approach to bringing the gospel into other cultures in which missionaries are working and serving that are unfamiliar with Christianity. Both Newbigin and Bosch made a similar observation to what Trueman is sharing here, in that they said our understanding of the broader culture is actually more helpful for us to figure out how to navigate it and have to live out the gospel in a really clear, countercultural way if we simply consider our surrounding culture to be pagan—and in that term he means just one that doesn't know God, isn't based in the ideas of Christianity.

Hunter: And there is real disagreement between Christianity and this modern world we live in. And this is one of the reasons why many refer to this disagreement as a culture war. Trueman acknowledges that term has some good reasons for it. He suggests that perhaps 'cultural protest' would be a better way of saying that. And I think he wants to help us keep our edge as Christians as maybe a resistance or as people who are differentiated from the world we live in and are willing to make public arguments for truth. And yet, he wants us to do that in a way in a manner that's also Christian. And he uses an example of this, Justin Martyr, who was an apologist, it was called, in the second century. And he says this:

The so-called Greek apologists, such as Justin Martyr, addressed the Roman Empire from a Christian perspective. What's

so interesting when compared to some of the ways many Christians right and left do so today is how respectful these ancient apologists were. They didn't spend their time denouncing the evils of the emperor in his court. Rather, they argued positively that Christians made the best citizens, the best parents, the best servants, the best neighbors, the best employees, and they should thus be left alone to carry on with their day-to-day lives without being harassed by the authorities. Of course, there were limits to what they could do to participate in civic life. If they were asked to sacrifice to the emperor as a god, they would have to refuse. But beyond such demands, they could be good members of the Roman community.

And in the same way, there are things that we might be asked to do and go along with. I know, as parents have children in schools, this is one of the things they have to navigate a lot. There are things that might be taught in the schools that we can't allow to be taught to our children, and so we can't go along with that. And yet, if you will give us—we can make this argument—if you will give us space to teach our children what we believe is true, we'll be good citizens of this world that we live in. And that was kind of the message that the earlier apologists had.

Autumn: And that Trueman is actually suggesting we look to as an example that we continue to be, he calls it, 'constructive members of wider society.' Not simply being shaped by the culture, but participating still fully in it to the extent that we can. Unless, as you read in the quote, if asked to sacrifice to the emperor as to a god, they would have to refuse. So, unless we encounter something that is a violation of God's law or God's reality.

Hunter: And I think it's important to say we will encounter those things. And so, this is not some hypothetical, well, maybe there will be a few things like emperor sacrifice. No one's asked to do that. But this is a reality. Some of the schools want to teach your children understandings of what it means to be human that are simply going to undo who God made them to be and are completely inconsistent with the worship we're called to offer to God. And so, I think you have to resist that. I don't think you should be complicit in that. So, that's just like we mentioned that already. But that's a real live example today that I think many parents wrestle with. I do get a little concerned that sometimes when Christians like us talk about being good citizens, we can just assume that if we do that there's not going to be any resistance at all. So, I just want to put in front of our listeners, hey, there's actually going to be real resistance there. And we need to balance that reality with the insistence that we can still be good citizens of the world we live in. He also mentions, how do we make a case for truth in the public square? And I thought he did this really well. He said this, 'On key issues such as abortion'—this is an issue that often gets argued in the public square—'On key issues such as abortion, Christians in the West are still at liberty to use their rights as members of the earthly city to campaign for the good. And I'm not calling for passive quietism whereby Christians abdicate their civic responsibilities or make no connection between how to pursue those civic responsibilities and their religious beliefs.' So, he's not advocating for a quietism, keep your religion to yourself, don't bring it to the public square. But he's saying this, I'm suggesting rather that engaging in cultural warfare, using the world's tools, rhetoric and weapons is not the way for God's people. And this is where he points back to Justin Martyr as an example of someone who did make a public case for Christian truth in a way that used Christian resources and Christian ethics and Christian behavior to do that.

Autumn: In that approach, you summarized Trueman's reflection on Justin Martyr. He also points out that this is, he calls it a long game. So, the picture we get here is of faithful grounded living that isn't coopted by the zeitgeist of the age that

is rooted in truth, in the nature of reality that is given to us in the Bible, and still lovingly—this is what he means when he says doesn't use the tools of the age—still lovingly engages the people we encounter, be it our neighbors, our coworkers, without compromising truth.

Hunter: Another example he uses is Augustine, who wrote the book *City of God*. And Augustine and Justin Martyr are separated by 250-300 years. And yet, they're both kind of presenting Christian truth in the public square. In a similar way, he summarized this. He says, 'If the apologist and Augustine'—who are separated by 300 years—'were passive quietists, it's hard to explain how Christianity came to be so dominant in the West for so many centuries. The historical evidence'—which, again, it played out over 300-400 years—'the historical evidence suggests rather that their approach proved remarkably effective over time.' And so, again, perhaps not in my lifetime or even and that of my children, but God is sovereign, God plays the long game, and God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Autumn: Let's move on to the third point. Trueman lays out the third point as, 'Teach the whole council of God.'

Hunter: And I think we could summarize this point by saying Christians are tempted to only teach on the areas of resistance in our culture. So, for example, if sexuality is a place of resistance, then what we're tempted as Christians is to talk about sex all the time. Or if gender is a place of resistance, we're tempted to talk about gender all the time. Or if individualism is a place of resistance, we are tempted, and I'm certainly tempted by this, to talk about individualism all the time. And he's making the point that we do have to speak to these very specific issues—and this is really the central insight of his work—but there's deeper things underneath that. And the Christian understanding of those things only makes sense if you understand the whole Christian substructure, what he calls the whole counsel of God. In the same way, you can only understand how do we get to modern notions of gender and sexuality that he calls this strange new world? How do we get there? Well, you can only understand how we got there if you understand all the historical and philosophical substructure underneath. That's what his work is meant to explain. In the same way you can only understand Christian understanding of personhood if you understand all the substructure underneath, like who is God and why did he create us and what's wrong with us? And where is history headed? Like, this is the whole Christian substructure. So, we simply making the point that we need to teach the fullness of God's word if we're going to be able to offer a countercultural witness.

Autumn: You said this before when we were discussing this article for the episode today. Hunter, you made the note that I think is really relevant here. Christianity offers really robust understanding and definitions of ideas like justice and happiness, as we mentioned before, but when they're derived from culture, the essence of those words, those ideas, is very different than what is derived from God's Word. And yet, without understanding the fullness of the story of God and without teaching the whole counsel of God, we can easily be pulled to a cultural understanding of those ideas.

Hunter: Our world uses a lot of the same words that are found in the Bible, and yet they mean something different by those words, and the meaning is deeply formed—there're a lot of assumptions about what those words mean—so, you mentioned some of them justice, happiness, or joy. Love is a word that is in both the Bible and it's in secular culture. But there's a whole substructure underneath that means something entirely different and informs what we mean by those things. So, I've watched this happen in the last few years. Like justice, for example; I've seen many Christians in a desire

to connect with the world. 'Oh, you want justice? Well, we want justice too! Our Bible actually talks about justice, so here's a place we can connect,' right? When they start talking about justice, they're actually just talking about it in the way that modern secular people would talk about justice. And they're not bringing in the full council of God. And this is partly because they may not know the full counsel of God. And so, Carl Trueman is arguing we need to teach and study the whole council of God. He says teach, which is a particular challenge to pastors. But for our listeners, even if they're not teachers, you need to study the whole Council of God, and that might mean going back and understanding some of the substructure and doing some foundational kind of work. And I've done a lot of that foundational work. I mean, I took a graduate course, a 120 hours graduate course on that foundational kind of work. And I can tell you that studying that substructure is a little boring compared to debating some of these issues, right? It's not quite as thrilling. It doesn't feel- some of the books I had to read and the stuff I had to study was a little dry compared to, let's debate issues of gender and sexuality. And yet it was really, really helpful. And I was able to see, as I did that, how much I had not seen previously and understood previously. And I started to make connections like, oh, that explains that, explains that, explains that. So, I hope some of our listeners will take that up as a personal challenge.

Autumn: One of the values that upholds our main value of the gospel here at Fellowship, we talk about in our DNA class—which is our introductory class to Fellowship Denver, and also serves as our pathway to membership—we talk about several values that are connected with 'and' statements. I think this is relevant here, and actually Trueman is bringing in this idea. One of those 'and' statements that we teach to our congregation, to our church family at Fellowship is 'Scripture *and* Orthodoxy.' And you've explained the connection and the necessity of both, but I wonder if you could touch on that again, Hunter, because Trueman actually does. He makes a case here for utilizing tools that are historic and traditional, like catechism.

Hunter: Well, Scripture, we mean the Bible, the book of the Bible, which we believe are inspired by God, and we go into that in our DNA group here. That's our authority on all matters that they speak to, that's our authority. But then we're acknowledging something else. Any time we begin to discuss the Bible, anytime someone stands up and teaches the Bible, like, here's what the Bible says, we've moved from the realm of God speaking, which is what happens in Scripture, we've moved from the realm of God speaking to we are talking about what God said. And we should know, going all the way back to the Garden of Eden, anytime we talk about what God said, we could be wrong or we could be slightly off, right? So, then the question becomes, how do we know that what we're saying about what God said, and how do we know that what we think God said is what God said? And Orthodoxy simply means this: on the big questions of what Scripture teaches, on the big questions, there is a pattern of interpreting the Bible that has been hashed out over now 2000 years. Some of the key questions have even been summarized in creeds and in confessions, and it's a guide for interpretation. It's not authoritative in the same way that the Bible itself is authoritative. The creeds and the confessions always have to sit under the authority of the Bible. But they are guides for us. And, to the extent that they represent the wisdom of cultures and generations that have gone before us, then they help us not be captive to our own culture and our own generation. So, if I read something in a Christian creed, or if I can see this is the consistent pattern of Christian understanding of the Bible for 2000 years, and if I think the Bible teaches something different, then it's highly, highly likely that I think it teaches something different because I've been shaped by the world I live in and I haven't actually, for the first time in history, discovered what the Bible really means. It's highly likely that I'm wrong. That's the benefit of orthodoxy. It provides us a pattern for interpreting scripture. So, to put Scripture and orthodoxy together means that we

study the Bible. It's our authority. We want to go to in as our first source and we want to do that in conversation and really in submission to the pattern of interpretation that has gone before us.

Autumn: In this section, in point three, Trueman states what you just said in this way: 'These provide solid'—and by these he's referencing the creed's, confessions and the catechism—'These provide solid, general, conceptual foundations by which the church can approach contemporary challenges, and they do so in a way that sets the immediate problems of our day in the context of the broader framework of perennial Christian truth.'

Hunter: That's a great summary and I have this conversation a lot right now with people about the issue of sexuality. And the case I make is simply this: there's been a consistent understanding of what the Bible teaches about sexuality. I mean that in all senses, like, how is human sexuality meant to be practiced in worship to God? There's a consistent understanding for 2000 years across many different cultures about what the Bible teaches on Christian sexuality. And there're a lot of substructure underneath that assumptions that inform it that Carl Trueman draws out. So, if a church today teaches something that differs from that consensus, that is by definition, just factually, it's unorthodox. Meaning it goes against the pattern of interpretation that's been handed down. And if there's an unorthodox teaching on sexuality, there are probably all the assumptions underneath from the modern culture that have been imported with that. And so, what is highly, highly likely is that unorthodox teaching on sexuality is going to lead us into an unorthodox teaching on everything else in the Bible or many other things in the Bible, which means that what we're going to have is a form of "Christianity" that's not the same thing that Jesus originally taught and was given to his disciples. It's not factually Christianity in the historical sense. And so, that's an example of where we can't just go, well, there's different opinions about sexuality. There're actually a lot of things that inform that such that you have to decide if you want to be Christian or you want to have a different religion that kind of sounds like Christianity, but it's really just modern philosophy.

Autumn: This is an excellent place to wrap up today's discussion. So, in looking back briefly at these three points, Trueman is challenging us to recognize our, the modern Western church's, complicity in the state of the church and culture as it exists now. Second, to learn from the ancient church; he draws parallels from our context to that of the Church just after the apostolic age passed. And then, in his third point, challenges us to teach the whole council of God. Or, as it were, 'teach' maybe is to churches, but to learn and listen to and sit under and seek after the whole council of God as individual believers. Hunter thanks for joining me today.

Hunter: That's just the first half of the article.

Autumn: It's the first half. So, read the article. That's our encouragement. But I appreciate you taking time to discuss it with me today. If you have questions about today's episode or questions or suggestions about something you'd like to hear us discuss on the podcast in the future, you can send all of that any time to podcast@fellowshipdenver.org. Thanks for joining us on the Vision for Life podcast special thanks to Adam Anglin for our theme music, to Jesse Cowan, our producer, and to Judd Connell, who provides transcription for these episodes.