

# The Danger of Loving a Theological System More Than the Savior

by Daniel L. Akin

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*This sermon warns against the danger of loving a theological system more than the Savior, emphasizing the importance of balance, passion, and grace in theology.*

**Duration:** 31:04

**Scripture:** Psalm 5:5, Psalm 11:5, Malachi 1:2-3, Matthew 11:3, Matthew 22:34, 1 Corinthians 8:1-3

**Topics:** "Theological System"

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## Description

In this sermon, Danny Akin addresses the issue of extreme Calvinism and its negative impact on believers. He emphasizes the importance of loving Jesus and his church above any theological system. Akin encourages listeners to prioritize sharing the gospel with the lost and to approach others with grace and kindness. He also highlights the dangers of theological extremes, which can lead to a lack of balance, passion, and wisdom in ministry.

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## Transcript

Well, thank you for being here this morning and thank you for preparing our hearts for the Word. Take your Bible and join me in the book of Matthew chapter 22 and verse 34. And also put your finger in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 verses 1 through 3. I've had the joy of preaching in seminary or college chapels now for 17 years.

Actually, I'm in my 18th year. And this will be the first time in my life that I have not bought and brought a verse by verse exposition of a text. The reason that I do so is because I feel there is an issue that has the urgency that requires that I depart from what I always do.

The title of my message this morning is The Danger of Worshipping a Theological System More Than Your Savior. And I have a very good reason for addressing this issue. The first week of chapel services, President Mohler and I did our best to try to help our faculty and our students achieve some balance, some sanity, some wisdom and understanding when it comes to how to develop a good, well-rounded, biblically grounded theology.

And much to my disappointment and heartache, apparently some folks still just don't get it. You say, why would you say that? Oh, a couple of reasons. I have here an email that was sent to me by one of my

colleagues, a professor of theology.

Hi, Danny. An interesting discussion took place in our theology course today. We addressed the differences between Arminian and Calvinist views of election and predestination.

A number of students had a very warped view of Arminianism in general, believing that Arminians take credit for their salvation because they accept Christ. Others referred to themselves as Arminians, but almost cowered when articulating the idea. It seems that they have been heavily chastised by others.

Indeed, one woman reluctantly indicated that someone had even questioned her salvation because of her position. I'm concerned, as you are, that the hyper-Calvinists are quite vocal and seem to be upsetting other students. As you know, I am a very committed Calvinist, but I hope that we do something about the current situation so that Arminianism is not falsely presented and criticized and so that Calvinism does not come across as this hard, deterministic system that does away with significant human responsibility and freedom.

Then last week, my son brought this to my attention, not the professor, so lest you be the guilty one of having committed this sin, take up your gripe with Jonathan and not the professor. This was put on one of your colleagues, gentlemen, and one of your professors' doors. It is a quote allegedly from Spurgeon.

I have my own opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified unless we preach what is nowadays called Calvinism. It is the nickname to call it Calvinism, but Calvinism is the gospel and nothing else. I will not read the remainder of the quote, simply to note this.

Number one, there is no citation as to where exactly Spurgeon said this. It sounds like something Spurgeon could have said, but I have no indication that he actually said it because there is no citation. So the person that did this, first of all, was guilty of poor scholarship.

Secondly, there is no context in which Spurgeon made this statement, and I can direct you to the writings of Spurgeon, where he will with equal force emphasize human responsibility and the moral obligation to repent of one's sins and believe the gospel, and where he also challenges all ministers of the gospel to preach it promiscuously. Thirdly, whoever did this is a coward because you did not put your name on this. It also means that evidently you do not have the courage of your own alleged convictions.

Now let me make myself clear. When I was in seminary at Southwestern, we had a professor, or actually a guest preacher, come one day, and actually came for three days, and he spoke in chapel against the doctrine of inerrancy, against the doctrine of biblical infallibility. He said in his chapel address that the Old Testament God was a mean and cruel God by any standard of measurement, and he was not the God of the New Testament.

I was so grieved by what he said that I wrote a four-page response. I published 1,000 editions of it at my own expense. I, first of all, sent it to him before I ever put it out on the campus of Southwestern Seminary, and I did put my name at the end of that response.

That's what integrity would demand that you do. And so because evidently some are still not getting it, I want to talk to you this morning about the danger of loving a theological system more than you love the Savior. In Matthew chapter 22, Jesus has just sliced and diced the Sadducees over a theological issue that they thought would trap him.

And so in verse 34, when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and very foolishly, they bring their own theological agenda to the table, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him, saying, Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? And Jesus responded very directly by saying, You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your mind. This is the first and the great commandment. Then in 1 Corinthians chapter 8, in verse 1 through verse 3, Paul is addressing the Corinthians who likewise were quite fascinated with theological speculation, and they in particular were finding ways to get around certain moral behaviors that clearly derived from a practice of the gospel.

In this context, it is meat offered to idols. And so now concerning things offered to idols, I believe the next statement is a Corinthian slogan. We know that we have all knowledge.

Paul responds and gets to the point, knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one will be known by him.

As I was thinking about what I was going to say to you this morning, Saturday, as I was walking through my neighborhood, I initially was quite angry that I was even having the need to do this. But then as the Lord began to work in my heart, I moved away from my anger to sadness. And now I am at the point of genuine pity for some of our students who, based upon what I see, give overwhelming evidence that they are more in love with a theological system than they are Jesus.

And so there are five questions I want to raise this morning and respond to that I hope will provide some guidance. And yes, for some of you, bring you to a point of genuine repentance and brokenness over what I perceive to be nothing less than sin. My first question, what has been my own theological pilgrimage and observations in this area? I have three of them.

Number one, extremes in theology are always dangerous. When I moved to Dallas, Texas, I was immediately confronted with neo-Pentecostal charismatic theology because Dallas-Fort Worth happens to be a hotbed for that kind of movement. We had Word of Faith to the north, Church on the Rock to the east, and Calvary Temple to the west, as well as E.V. Grant espousing his various heresies along the way.

I had someone confront me telling me that if I had not received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and had not spoken in tongues, then certainly I was not saved. An extreme of pneumatological theology. Later, I ran into some persons from Dallas Seminary who are quite convinced that if you are not a Schofield type of dispensationalist, then again, most certainly you are shallow in your faith.

And again, we should question the vitality and the genuineness of your theology. Now, let me make myself clear. I am not a cessationist.

I believe that God can still do the miraculous and that all the spiritual gifts denoted in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, Romans 12, 1 Peter 4, and Ephesians 4 are still operative today. Furthermore, as you would know if you were here last year, I am a pre-millennial, pre-tribulationist. I am a type of dispensationalist.

And yet, I would be the last person to tell you that if you do not cross all of Schofield, O'Reilly's dispensationalities and dot their eyes that you somehow are deficient in your understanding of eschatology. Of course, I've also recently run into some persons who believe that if you're not a young earth creationist, then again, you have a most defective view of God, of creation, and therefore you must

be cast in the category of being a liberal. Now again, let me make myself clear.

I am a young earth creationist, but I do not believe that being a young earth creationist is a requirement for one to be indeed a true blue Bible-believing evangelical theologian or Christian. Of course, when I first began Bible college in my second year, I was hogtied one day by a hyper-Calvinist who took me into a room and spent two hours trying to convert me to five-point double-predestinarian superlapsarian Calvinism. Any independent evangelist would have been proud of how he pressed the issue with me, and now he virtually had me on my knees in a hammerlock trying to get me to make a decision for Calvin.

To his great disappointment, he failed, but he did succeed in leaving a very distasteful taste in my mouth concerning persons who try to push a theological agenda more than they want to share the gospel. But then I moved on to Southwestern Seminary, and at Southwestern Seminary, I am glad to say that Calvinists became my friends because when I was at Southwestern Seminary, even in the 1980s, it was the case that already that seminary was drifting into liberalism. And when I came across classmates and, on rare occasions, a professor who affirmed Reformed theology, I knew without any debate I was talking to someone who believed the Bible.

And indeed, in God's grace, I came across two Calvinists in particular who became and still are great blessings to my life. One man's name is Ben Mitchell. He teaches at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, along with Dr. Mohler.

I hired him to teach here. The other is Chad Brand, who has been my friend for more than 20 years, and he could tell you, though he is giving a lecture across the way, I tried to hire him at Southeastern Seminary, and I rejoiced greatly when he agreed to come and teach here at Southern Seminary. These were men who believed in Reformed theology, but did so in such a healthy, winsome way that I was indeed glad to call them my friends and sit down and affirm much of what they believed in terms of their own theology.

But extremes in theology are dangerous. Secondly, extremes in theology are also distasteful. I think I made that clear just a moment ago with my example from my experience at Crystal College.

Thirdly, extremes in theology are also destructive. You say, why would you say that? Because first of all, they lack the balance necessary to a healthy theology. Secondly, in the context of Reformed thinking, it often results in a lack of passion for the very purpose that Jesus Christ came into the world.

Mark chapter 10 verse 45 is the crucial key soteriological verse in that gospel, and Jesus says, the Son of Man did not come to be ministered to, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many. He came to die for our sins that the world might be saved. Luke 19 10, where he talks about the Son of Man came to seek and save that which is lost.

And if you have any agenda that is different than the agenda of Jesus, then you have a theology that is out of balance. I've also discovered that because of extremes in theology, you also have a lack of grace in how you treat others. And you also often exhibit a lack of wisdom in how you approach and do ministry.

And so those have been some of my theological observations in my 25 plus years in the ministry. I have a second question. What are some of the realities that you need to understand about Southern Seminary and Boyce College? I have four to make very quickly.

First, the issue is not particular redemption. That is not the issue at all. The issue is what you wrongly emphasize and how you treat other people.

That is the issue. Secondly, I, along with Dr. Moeller, hired every single person on this faculty, every one of them. So I hired the five pointers.

I hired the four pointers of which I am one didn't hire myself. He did. And so understand that about the president.

And I also hired the three pointers, which leads me to a third observation. If you have read our abstract carefully, you will understand that it does require three of the classic points of Calvinism. It does require total depravity.

It does require unconditional election. It does require perseverance of the saints. It does allow for effectual calling.

It does allow for particular redemption. But it does not require those latter two points. And I believe the document was purposefully drafted in that way.

And every single person that has been hired on this faculty, President Moeller and I knew exactly where they were in their understanding of these issues. Fourthly, persons with these types of theological agendas, I can assure you are not ready for ministry, at least not a ministry that God is going to bless greatly. Question number three, what are some of the evidences that you worship a theological system more than you worship the Savior? I have eight of these.

One, your goal is to convert fellow believers in churches to your theological system more than to Jesus. And I will tell you this. When I meet someone who tells me out of the chute that they are someone who affirms the doctrines of grace, I look to run the other way.

You say you're against them. No, I'm not against them. But that's not the first thing you're going to hear coming out of my mouth.

If you want to know what I love, I'll tell you, I love Jesus with all of my heart, with all of my soul, with all of my strength. I know I don't love him perfectly, but I am more in love with him, as Dr. Merritt said yesterday, at the 46th year of my life than I have ever been. Now, I love all the wonderful teachings that go along with understanding who he is and what he did.

And by the way, I commend to you this morning, Dr. Moeller's web blog, where he talks about the danger of not thinking correctly about who Jesus is and what Jesus did and how that affects all of your theology. But if that is the first thing that pops into your mind when someone asks you to talk about yourself, I assure you, you've got a serious theological imbalance. Number two, you believe that God does not have a genuine love for all persons created by him in his image.

This is tragically the fallout of the extremes in persons like John Gill and Arthur Pink, men that I would commend to you to read, but men I would not commend to you to emulate at every point of their theology. In a number of areas, they just slap dab got it wrong. And by the way, if Spurgeon indeed said what he said a moment ago, he got it wrong because Calvinism is not the gospel.

The gospel is the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a perfect atonement for the forgiveness of sins. That is the gospel. Now, do I believe that the basic system of Calvinism is consistent with the gospel? Yes, I do.

But Calvinism is not the gospel. And so on that particular occasion, the good Charles Spurgeon got it wrong. Number four, you believe inviting people to trust Christ and engaging in personal confrontational evangelism is somehow doing the work of the Holy Spirit.

Number four, you believe it is wrong to do decisional evangelism, challenging people to decide, as Joshua says, choose you this day whom you will serve. Number five, you believe that some babies who die go to hell because they're not elect in spite of the fact that not a one of them has ever committed a conscious, sinful act against God, which is the very basis of judgment at the great white throne. Read Revelation chapter 20 and verse 12.

I have up here this morning a book by John MacArthur I would commend to all of you. It's entitled Safe in the Arms of God, Truth from Heaven About the Death of a Child. In this book, Dr. MacArthur, in a very similar way to what Dr. Moeller and I did a number of years ago, tries to build, and I think does a compelling argument for the election and the salvation of all persons who never reach an age of moral comprehension and discernment.

In other words, all who die in infancy are elect. I talked to Rick Holland, who is the student minister there a couple of weeks ago, told him how much I appreciated the book. He said, well, it's been very interesting.

This may wind up being the most popular book that Dr. MacArthur ever wrote. It is just selling. We can't keep it.

He said it's also very interesting that he's only received criticism from one segment of the Christian world, the Reformed world, and he has received a large number of letters and emails chastising him because he would dare say that God in his mercy and grace and love and kindness and compassion would have the audacity to elect those who die before reaching a state of moral discernment. In the book, Dr. MacArthur cites approvingly a message by one of the fellow elders, Phil Johnson, who said this, I met one fellow whose own child died in infancy. He seemed to think that there was something meritorious about believing his own child had gone to hell.

Every chance he got, he brought up the issue and boasted about how he and his wife had come to grips with the fact that their child was simply not among the elect. I told him I thought he and his wife were in for a pleasant surprise when they get to glory. I recall that he said he was absolutely certain that if God elected that infant to salvation, he would have kept him alive long enough to bring him to faith.

My reply was that he could have just had just as much biblical warrant to conclude that if God had decided not to elect that child, he would have kept him on earth long enough for the child's heart to be hardened by sin and for his rebellion against God to be manifested through deliberate actions. Because whenever scripture describes the inhabitants of hell, it always does. So with list of sins and abominations, they have deliberately committed.

We might look at the biblical data and conclude that when God takes the life of a little one, it is actually an act of mercy, keeping that child from being hardened by a life of exposure to evil and a life of deliberate rebellion against God. And then he concludes by saying one's position on this issue will say a lot about

one's view of God and his grace. I would add it will also say a lot about you.

Number six, you believe God hates the unsaved and the non-elect and actually delights in their damnation in spite of texts like Ezekiel 18, 23, where he says he has no pleasure in the death of the unrighteous. Now, I am very much aware of text like Psalm five, five, Psalm 11, five, and Malachi one, two and three and Romans nine. And yet I understand clearly and easily how those texts can be understood in context and in harmony with God's love for all creatures that bear his image.

Now, at this point, let me throw out a playful challenge. If you are in need of converting someone to your extreme Calvinist position, to quote Doc Holliday in the movie Tombstone, I'm your Huckleberry. My office is right across the valley.

I have an open door policy. And lest you think that it would be too intimidating, too intimidating for you to come by yourself, then gather your little Calvinist posse and come on over. Now, let me make myself clear.

I will not get angry with you. I will not mistreat you. And there will be no repercussions, regardless of the nature of the conversation that we have with one another.

But I'm delighted if you need someone to convert, come and try and see if you can crack this hard nut. I'll be delighted to give you every opportunity to refine your theological argument. Number seven, you go into churches with an agenda to convert others to your way of thinking.

And in the process, you rebel against God ordained authority and you become divisive. And yes, that has happened far too often in the last four or five years. And number eight, you send to others anonymous letters, emails, notes, or flyers on their door.

As I said a moment ago, this only reveals your own cowardice, spiritual immaturity, lack of judgment, and lack of love for others. If you really do love them, you will go see them and face-to-face, man-to-man, or woman-to-woman, or man-to-woman, or woman-to-man, and talk to them in that kind of genuinely Christian kind of a way. Question number four, why do persons act like this? Why do persons act like this? I have five observations.

I'll just note them quickly. Number one, and I think it is number one, you don't love Jesus enough. You love a system more than you love Jesus.

Number two, you don't love his church as you ought. You see the church and all of its illness, all of its sickness, all of its weakness. And rather than remember and recall that Christ died for that church, shed his blood for the church, you have less love in your heart for it than you ought.

Number three, you don't love your brothers and sisters as you should, because you're certainly not approaching them in a winsome, gracious, and kind way. Number four, you don't love lost people like God loves lost people. And as I said, fifthly, many times now, you have an imbalance in your theology.

So my final question, what should be your response to what I have said this morning? Well, number one, if you're offended, I'm probably talking to you. If you're mad, offended, don't like what I've said, then I'm probably talking to you. Secondly, if you were the one who put a flyer on one of your professor's door, throw down the gauntlet to you today.

Have the Christian character and maturity to go see them, apologize for what you did, and ask them for their forgiveness, because you sinned against God and against them. If you don't have the courage to put your name to something, then don't send it. That is the actions of a coward.

And if you don't like it, then you come see me. I'll be here at the end of this service, and I'll be glad to take you on in conversation. I never say anything.

This is going to be taped. I don't say what I don't say without the willingness for it to go anywhere and everywhere with my name attached to it. Right or wrong, Danny Aiken will take responsibility for what Danny Aiken says and believes.

You should do the same thing. Number three, ask the Lord to forgive you for your sin of pride and for the fact that you have fallen into virtually idolatry. Idolatry by loving a system more than you love the Savior.

Number four, ask the Lord to give you a love for others in the same way that he loves others. In fact, the next time you feel compelled to go and share your Calvinist gospel, let me challenge you to go up to your room, drop to your knees, and ask God to bring to your heart lost persons that you can intercede for. Then after that, if you still have energy, then ask God to give you the courage either to sit down and write a letter, make a phone call, or get in your car and go drive over to the home of that lost person and share the life-changing gospel with them.

I challenge you to do that. Number five, ask the Lord to give you wisdom and balance in your theology and your ministry. Let me remind you this morning that the greatest theologian who ever lived was also the greatest missionary evangelist who ever lived.

His name was Paul. Paul wrote Romans 9, 10, and 11. Paul was the great theologian of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, and yet Paul also was the greatest missionary evangelist who ever lived.

There, ladies and gentlemen, is your model. And number six, ask the Lord to give you a knowledge and a passion, a mind and a heart for him. And listen to me now.

I speak to you this day, I hope you hear my heart. I came to speak to you today like a daddy would talk to his children, because I'm now at a point in my life where I'm old enough to be the daddy of many of you. If you make the Lord Jesus Christ the center of your theology, everything else will fall into a healthy place.

I promise you it will. If you are passionately in love with him, if you passionately want to know him, if you are consumed to understand who he is, what he did, and how everything flows from there, I promise you, you will bring and have a balance to your theology and also to the way that you do ministry. Guys and gals, brothers and sisters, I speak as one of you, let's make sure, regardless of what it might be, that we do not love any kind of system more than we love the Lord Jesus.

Let me close this in prayer. Heavenly Father, I thank you so much that you have revealed so much about who you are in your word. Lord, let's not be misunderstood.

I thank you for the wonderful discipline of theology. I thank you that we can delve into your word and we can talk to the great men and women of history and we can understand better the doctrine of God, the doctrine of revelation. We can understand both the majesty and the depravity of man who has been made in your image.

We can understand the glory and the awesomeness of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, fully God, fully man, who provided a perfect atonement for sin. And yes, we can also study the wonderful truths of the Holy Spirit, salvation, the church, and last things. But Lord, may we never, ever, ever become more passionate about converting people to our particular way of thinking about theology than we do about the Lord Jesus.

May we always, always keep him first and foremost in any way that we think and in the way that we minister. I ask and pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

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