

Ben Best, Co-host

Welcome to *defragmenting*, a podcast of Cairn University, promoting biblical integrity and thoughtful Christianity.

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"We are most vulnerable to drifting from the core teachings of the Christian faith when we find them boring, irrelevant, or embarrassing." This is a quote from Dr. Trevin Wax's new book, *The Thrill of Orthodoxy: Rediscovering the Adventure of Christian Faith*. He wrote it to counteract the familiarity with Christian teaching that he says is the enemy of wonder. He joins Dr. Keith Plummer to discuss a wide variety of topics, including the subtle, yet often imperceptible ways that we drift from the gospel, how ancient summaries of scriptural teaching, like the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian creeds, serve as valuable maps and grammars, why doctrinal details matter, and how Christian orthodoxy, contrary to its detractors, is actually broader, richer, and more satisfying than its heretical contenders. Let's join their conversation now.

Dr. Keith Plummer

I am delighted to have as my conversation partner today, Dr. Trevin Wax. Trevin is vice president of research and resource development at the North American Mission Board and a visiting professor at Cedarville University. He is a former missionary to Romania, and he's a regular columnist at *The Gospel Coalition* and has contributed to *The Washington Post*, *Religion News Service*, *World*, and *Christianity Today*. He's taught courses on mission and ministry at Wheaton College and has lectured on Christianity and culture at Oxford University. He is the founding editor of *The Gospel Project*, an inaugural fellow with The Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics, and he is the author of numerous books, including *The Multi-Directional Leader*, *Rethink Your Self*, *This Is Our Time*, *Gospel Centered Teaching*, and the one I asked him to talk with me about today, his latest, *The Thrill of Orthodoxy: Rediscovering the Adventure of Christian Faith*, published by IVP. Fervent welcome, and thank you for accepting the invitation.

Dr. Trevin Wax

Well, thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, you dedicate your book to your parents. And one of the things that you say there is you say that they passed down the treasure. Before we talk about some of the nuts and bolts of the book, I was curious about that and wanted to ask you, how did they pass down the treasure, by which I assume you mean the treasure of the gospel? What were the ways that they did that? Tell us a little bit about how you came to faith.

Dr. Trevin Wax

Well, they certainly brought me up from the very beginning, I never remember a time when we weren't in a community of faith. We were in church from the very beginning of my life. Even before I knew how to read, they were teaching me catechism questions and answers. They taught me early, and they put a lot of Bible doctrine into me and wanted me to know Scripture. It's strange—I guess I had a hunger for God's word, even from the time I was really young. I remember being five or six and with just learning how to read and wanting to memorize parts of the Bible kind of on my own. I think I saw it modeled in their lives. And over time, watching them and the way that they took their faith seriously, the way they applied their faith to questions that would come up in life, the way their faith influenced their marriage, their relationships, their parenting. It's not that my parents didn't make mistakes. They would be the first ones to tell you they made plenty. But they certainly, when it came to the most important thing in their mind, the most important thing in their mind was to be a demonstration of the gospel that they were sharing with us as kids.

Dr. Trevin Wax

And so, I, very early on, understood that I was a sinner and needed Jesus as my Savior. That was early in life, and then as a teenager, really came to a point where I realized, "Well, I'm going to have to really... If this is true, I really have to own this. This is going to change the course of my life. My parents were with me all the way through that. Also gave me a real heart for missions, took me to

Romania my very first time, which changed the course of my life once I spent significant time overseas, so yeah, I think, there was no question. I'd never dedicated a book to my parents yet, but this was the one. From the very beginning, I thought, no, this one is definitely dedicated to them because I'm very grateful. And I also want to pass the faith down to my kids, and if the Lord gives us grandkids, to them as well.

Dr. Keith Plummer

I'm sure it means so much to them. What led to your wanting to write this? Was there any particular event, circumstances that put this idea on your mind and heart, or has this been something that's been percolating for some time?

Dr. Trevin Wax

It's been several years. It's been percolating. I did a—I can't remember what year it was, I guess back in 2019, it would have been—I did a talk on "The Thrill of Orthodoxy." It's called "The Thrill of Orthodoxy" for *The Gospel Coalition's* national conference. Part of that was the influence of G.K. Chesterton. His book, *Orthodoxy, The Everlasting Man*, some of his writings, had really just... It was him, C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, others, that I had a passion for helping people see the freshness of orthodoxy, to not see it as a dusty and old, stale kind of thing. It started there, but I do think the burden increased over the years. The world has been rocked by a lot of scandals, a lot of division, a lot of decisions that have to do more with wisdom than with a "thou shalt" or "thou shalt not" from the Bible. And a lot of pastors, church leaders, Christians are facing challenges that they're not, you know, we just haven't been here before. And not always knowing what's the best approach or the best thing to do. There's a lot of debate, even about what our public stance should be on certain things or how we should engage the culture.

Dr. Trevin Wax

And I have the burden on this to say, look, I'm not going to claim to give you the answers to all of those questions, but I do know when the world seems to be shaking, I know where you can plant your flag. And it's good to go back and plant your flag with those same beliefs that Christians have been confessing for 2,000 years, and if Jesus doesn't return in the next 100, we'll still be confessing 100 years from now, no matter what we get right or wrong. And it was that sense of a desire to give people a, "Hey, let's get back to the basics." That's super important, and I wanted to encourage people to get back to the basics and to have confidence in the basics. I mean that's one of the—if I were to say one other thing that was a burden for me was I just feel like there's a lot of people that still believe the Christian faith is true, but they don't necessarily recognize its beauty, or they've lost confidence in the goodness. And that's one of the things, too, that I thought needed to be said. I wanted to increase the confidence level of the goodness and beauty of this Christian truth that we want to proclaim.

Dr. Keith Plummer

I think you succeeded. You started off the book by saying, "The church faces her biggest challenge not when new errors start to win, but when old truths no longer wow." And you follow up shortly thereafter and speak about how familiarity is the enemy of wonder. And what you were just describing is your concern that many people who might be professing followers of Christ, and they would agree with the creeds and so forth, may have lost a sense of not just the truthfulness, but the awe, the wonder of the faith. And we've been using the word "orthodoxy." Would you take a moment and tell us what you have in mind when you refer to orthodoxy and how it is that we determine it?

Dr. Trevin Wax

Yeah, that's a great question. I knew writing a book like that, that was going to have to be one of the fundamental things I do in the first chapter was to define it. I'm approaching this book in orthodoxy—for the purposes of this book—in the sort of C.S. Lewis *Mere Christianity*, Thomas Oden *Classic Christianity*, *Consensual Christianity*, which is really the trinitarian core of the faith that is summarized well in the three major creeds that are agreed on by virtually everyone, all the different branches of the Christian Church—the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian definition or the Athanasian Creed. For the purposes of this book, I thought we can get into more conversation about what constitutes Protestant orthodoxy or what. There's certainly evangelical emphases and essentials that come out in the writing of this book. But I wanted this to be a book that

really dug down deep to what I would consider to be the bedrock of the faith—the core of the core. It's striking that even among all of the massive differences, and there are some very, very big differences between Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicals, for example, or Roman Catholics and whatnot, that there would be that level of unity on the core of the core is in itself striking.

Dr. Trevin Wax

I went all the way there, in part because I wanted this book to introduce a lot of people to just the beauty and glory of church history and to show people that we've been here before, we've been in controversies before, we've been in—the church has faced challenges before. But look at how the church has sought to express biblical truth beautifully through these short summary statements. For the purposes of this book, I went to that core of the core of orthodoxy to say this is how we're defining the term for this.

Dr. Keith Plummer

In your discussion of that, you say that these ancient truths, these summarizations of Scripture and Scripture itself, they are a map for our journey as well as a grammar. I think that, probably most readers or listeners would have an intuition as to what you mean by a map, a direction. But what do you mean by a grammar for how we speak the language of faith?

Dr. Trevin Wax

Yeah, the beautiful thing about the creeds is that they're derived from Scripture. They're seeking to articulate what Scripture teaches about who God is and what He has done. And the importance of that is that by giving us a grammar, it's basically saying—we as Christians, we bear the name of Jesus Christ. He asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" And really, all Christian theology is a response to that question. What I'm saying with the creeds, when I talk about it being a grammar, I'm saying the church has, through the years and through debate and hashing things out, has sought to answer that question as well as possible, as accurately as possible, based on what the Bible teaches, so that we will speak in ways worthy of the Savior whose name we confess. That's what I mean by a grammar, is that there's a language, there's a logic, there's a way of theologizing within this framework that is given. And we should want that. Jesus deserves that. We should want to speak in ways worthy of the God we worship and adore—to get it right. And the grammar—speaking of the creeds as a grammar—is that it gives us some of those language lessons, we might call them, to say, this is how to speak accurately about God. And it matters that we speak accurately about God.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Following up on that, there are some who are suspicious of the pursuit of doctrinal clarity, accuracy (the word that you use), precision, because they take that to be an attempt to have this exhaustive knowledge of God, and therefore an emptying of the majesty, the mystery of God. And you say it's just the opposite. Tell us what you mean by that.

Dr. Trevin Wax

Yeah, I think some people think that if you get too precise in your theology, you're robbing God of His mystery. And certainly, the reality is we're staring into the sun. So there are going to be things that we are not able to comprehend. But most of the time when the Bible talks about mystery, it's talking about mystery being revealed. It's talking about revelation. And when Paul and others, when they talk about the unsearchable riches of grace or they talk about God's inscrutable ways, it's right after they've been marveling in the ways God has revealed His ways or His magnificent grace or whatnot. I think it's like the further in you go, the more mystery you discover. But the answer is not to back off from that level of precision and to just say it's all fuzzy. It's like the sharper the clarity becomes, the more beautiful the mystery is. Yeah, I think sometimes people appeal to mystery too quickly as a way of getting out of the hard work of, again, answering Jesus' question, who do you say that I am and what does it mean for me to be God in the flesh or to be the second person of the Trinity, to be Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and raised, King of the universe?

Dr. Trevin Wax

These are—the more we know God, the more we want to know Him. To say, "Oh, we should just leave it as a mystery." I mean—my wife is still a mystery to me many days, and yet I want to know her. I want

to know more about her. I want to grow in my knowledge of her. If it's like that in our human relationships, surely we should be looking to God who delights to reveal Himself to us in that way.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yeah, as I read what you were saying about that, my own experience just bore witness to it. The more that I grow in my knowledge of Christian theology, the greater has been my sense of the incomprehensibility of God. I mean, the more that I look at how people from the past and even contemporaries are seeking biblically grounded precision in who God is, the more I have been just dumbfounded by how immense and majestic and incomprehensible He is. And I think that doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God needs to be recovered. But yet in such a way that people realize that we're not affirming that God can't be known at all, but He can't be known in His fullness. And the thing that I find so exciting about that is that that's going to be true for eternity.

Dr. Trevin Wax

That's right.

Dr. Keith Plummer

That we will never reach the ends of God. And when people say things like, "Well, eternal life with God is going to be boring," I was like, you have no clue. So I really appreciated that. But let's talk about the idea of creeds, because I can imagine some people hearing or reading about the creeds and having this knee-jerk reaction, "Oh, well, isn't the Bible enough? Of what value are the creeds if we have the Scriptures?"

Dr. Trevin Wax

Right—there's a strain of evangelicalism. It sometimes shows up in Baptist circles, but also shows up, especially in the restorationist movement, the churches of Christ, the Christian churches and whatnot. There's a strain of evangelicalism that says, "We have no creed but the Bible." The fact is, though, that that's not ever been the dominant note that's been played throughout church history for virtually all groups within Christianity as to the place of creeds. Obviously, we believe scripture is inerrant and ultimately authoritative. As Protestants, we believe in the sola Scriptura, that Scripture is supreme. It doesn't mean that Scripture is the only authority, but it's the authority by which everything else must be judged. It's the supreme authority. And I agree with that. Creeds and councils and confessions must always go back to and bow down to Scripture. I think the reason that these three creeds in particular have been so widely accepted among so many various groups within Christianity for so long is that they have been seen to be very trustworthy representations of what the Bible itself teaches. So one of the things I wanted to do, especially for those who might be reading, they may come from more low church traditions or not, maybe they have an eyebrow raised at the question of creeds because they wonder why they're necessary.

Dr. Trevin Wax

I wanted to show people the beauty of these creeds and what they say next to all the Scripture references that back up what those creeds are as summaries of what Scripture teaches. So, in the first chapter of the book, you'll get every line of these creeds in one column, and then in the column across the page, all these Scripture references that show where these statements come from. And I don't even think I did an exhaustive job on getting all the Scripture references I could have pointed to. I just wanted to show people who may be a little skeptical about the place of creeds to say the reason that churches all over the world affirm these statements of faith is because they see how deeply scriptural they are. Their authority comes from the Scriptures that they summarize and from the fact that churches and Christians have recognized the importance and the necessity of these credal statements as guardrails, so to speak. They do help us stay within certain parameters because it's like a map. Like I said, once you know there's dangers over here, you got this path where there's all this room to run in, but you know where the dead ends are going to be, and you're able to stay on the path, on the trail.

Dr. Keith Plummer

You give what I thought was a very effective way of illustrating different ways that Christians drift from orthodoxy and what's common to all of them. One of the quotations that I had marked was,

"Whenever we assume the truth of the gospel, whenever we look at the fundamental teachings of Christianity as boring, irrelevant, a liability, or something to transcend, we are in danger of drifting." And that idea of drifting is a gradual process. Oftentimes, we're not aware of it. You mentioned a number of ways that this drifting can take place. Could you take maybe one of them and tell us what that consists of, what it looks like?

Dr. Trevin Wax

I think there are different reasons, different ways that we might drift without knowing it. And the thing that you mentioned there is a lot of times, it's imperceptible to us. We don't even recognize that it's happening. A common way is that people can drift just because they're going through a season of dryness, spiritually, looking for something innovative. I think some people are liable to drift because they're only focused on what's immediately practical. They just don't see a need for precision when it comes to theology or even Bible study or theological depth or anything like that, because they're like, "That doesn't really affect my day-to-day life. I know what I need to do as a Christian. I'll just do it" kind of a thing. I think today, one of the primary ways I see people, maybe in danger of drifting, is that they're just perpetually unsettled with aspects of the Christian faith that don't seem to sit well with our culture. I don't mean unsettled in the sense that they're not... I think at all times we've got to work our way through some things. I mean, there's going to be areas where Christianity is going to offend our sensibilities.

Dr. Trevin Wax

And I think we got to be honest about those. We got to recognize those, talk through those, learn through those. But if we get too satisfied with that sort of being perpetually unsettled, just always in that state, I think we actually lose something of our evangelistic witness, you know. I don't know that it's really attractive to tell people in the world, "Hey, why don't you come become a Christian so you can be as unsettled in your faith as I am in mine?" I don't know how that actually—you know—appeals or attracts other people. I think we're better off if we do what we can to move past that kind of mindset to having a real joyful confidence in the goodness of the faith and the truth of the faith. These are just some ways that we drift that I think we've got to be on guard against.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Concerning that temptation to be in this constantly unsettled state, you do identify two faulty ways of trying to reduce conflict with the world that is related to what you just said in some ways, accommodation and retreat. Could you give us a thumbnail sketch of what you have in mind by each of those?

Dr. Trevin Wax

I think there are good reasons to want to reduce conflict. I mean, enough of it. But I think what often happens is the sharp edges of Christianity, where it runs up against the world, it puts us in a place of discomfort and tension. I think there are two ways of trying to reduce that tension that actually lead to us losing the thrill of orthodoxy. The accommodation route is when you dull the sharp edges and you seek to accommodate or adapt Christianity so that it better suits contemporary sensibilities. You do that enough, you lose the thrill of orthodoxy because the distinction, the difference is gone. You lose the missionary part of the encounter that you have with the world, right, because there's nothing distinct there. The retreat impulse is also very, very powerful. That's sort of a—well, the way we reduce conflict with the world as we sort of retreat inward. We look inward as a body of believers, as a community of faith or whatnot. We lose the encounter part of the missionary thing. We want to preserve our purity at all costs, but are not really in any kind of engagement with people in the world around us. Depending on people's temperaments and personalities, I think we're all kind of drawn to one of those two at some level.

Dr. Trevin Wax

But in either case, what gets lost is what makes Christianity salty. Salt adds flavor because it's distinct, and salt is only good if it's on the meat, so you got to have both of those things. And I think that's one of the challenges. It's a challenge that we face in every generation. I don't think it's new. I'm sure other authors have probably said it better than me in the book. But I think it's one of the things we've always got to keep our eyes open to, is that those two ways of reducing the conflict can actually

produce the impact we might have.

Dr. Keith Plummer

I think, deep down within all of us, to some degree, is this desire that I will be able to follow Christ faithfully, and yet not have any conflict with the world. I remember when it first dawned on me what Jesus meant by it "is enough for a disciple to be as his teacher." I used to always think of that what he's talking about is becoming Christlike, as we think about Christlike in terms of conformity to character. But contextually, He's talking about, "They called me Beelzebub." You shouldn't expect that you are going to be treated better. I really appreciated what you had to say there. You did a very impressive job, I think, in terms of showing how it is that orthodoxy, far from being as many would conceive of it as being narrow, is actually robust and broad and complex and deep and beautiful. And in actuality, it is heresy that is narrow. Could you speak a little on what you had in mind there?

Dr. Trevin Wax

Yeah, this is pure Chesterton. This is one of the key points that he makes in *Orthodoxy* that has always just stuck with me. That heresy is always narrowing, narrowing, narrowing. And orthodoxy is always saying, no, don't choose "either/or"s, it's "both/and." These paradoxes are at the heart of the Christian faith. I wanted to make that point 100 years later in a different way, but showing and doing a little more work on the church history side, showing where this has actually been the case so that people would see exactly what it is I'm referring to. But also because I want, especially in our day, I think theological errors and heresies generally market themselves as broader and more inclusive than the stodgy old traditional ways of thinking about Christian theology. And I just wanted to blow up that myth. That's a marketing myth. It's not the reality. Heresies are always narrower than orthodoxy, almost always. So what I was trying to do with that was to show, using church history as a great example, to show again and again that heresies are generally oversimplifications of the truth, or they are the complete devotion to one truth, but weaponized against other truths.

Dr. Trevin Wax

It's not being—it's taking one truth out from the rest of these truths that need to be held together and then wielding that as a sword. And so that's the challenge that I wanted to show. When people hear theological error or when they see appeals to broadness and bigness and universality and inclusivity or whatnot in the name of we should be expanding Christianity or whatnot, I want them to actually see the narrowing effect that has and why Christianity, orthodoxy itself, is actually broader than you would think.

Dr. Keith Plummer

I know you recently had an article, I think, at *The Gospel Coalition* about about wanting the inclusive, exclusive Jesus. Is that kind of the—could you tell us a little bit about what that was about and how it relates to this?

Dr. Trevin Wax

Yes. I feel like we want to chop Jesus up sometimes, and you've got different groups in the church that would do this in different ways. Jesus calls all sinners to repentance. The world is sometimes upset that Jesus calls people to repentance. The church sometimes gets upset that Jesus calls all sinners, you know? I was basically saying, look, if you look at the life and the ministry of Jesus, He is radically inclusive in that He's eating with all the wrong kinds of people. He's making all the religious leaders mad. He's going around, He's talking to people He shouldn't be talking to, and He's inviting to the table people that are of ill repute and whatnot. You have this, and even the parables, the wedding feast and the banquet. There's this radically inclusive vision of the world at the heart of what Jesus is teaching. And at the same time, there's this strain of exclusive claims that He's making. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me," "The way is narrow, the way to life," "You must die to yourself if you're going to follow me," "There's only two ways to live."

Dr. Trevin Wax

What kind of fruit is going to be on the tree? The wise man builds his house on the rock or the wise man builds his house on the sand, and the result is destruction. There's this path or this other path. You don't find this sort of inclusive understanding of, There's many paths to salvation or many ways

to live. You've got Jesus saying, No, this is it. You must come this way. And the apostles are like that as well. "There's no other name under heaven by which people can be saved," Peter preaches. So there's that strain of exclusivity that is so strong there as well. And I think that—I want both of those held together. I don't just want the... That's what makes Jesus compelling. The Jesus who would just be sort of the Savior for a fundamentalist sect, the exclusive only just for themselves, misses a major part of Jesus' teaching, shrinks Jesus down. And at the same time, those who would say today, "Oh, we just want a Jesus who loves everybody, who calls everybody, who's just... It doesn't actually have that call to repentance and faith in Him, where that's not a... It's just the table is thrown open for everyone, well, trying to be broader than Jesus, you're actually narrowing the Great Commission in telling a lot of people, "Jesus may be for me, but He's not really for you, or He's not for everybody."

Dr. Trevin Wax

It's one of the points I tried to bring out in the book is that the thrill of orthodoxy is in that explosive combination of inclusivity and exclusivity, because that's at the heart of Jesus. That's what is so beautiful about Jesus.

Dr. Keith Plummer

As I was listening to you, I was thinking about how in literature there's a distinction made between flat and round characters. A flat character is one-dimensional, predictable, whereas a round character is unpredictable, and there are just so many dimensions to him or her that you can't really know which way they're going, not in a negative sense, but just because there's so much to them. There's a complexity to them. And as I hear you describing that, you're warning about our tendency to truncate Jesus, present Him as a flat character, and to lose sight of the depth of who He is.

Dr. Trevin Wax

Right. I think the Jesus we find in the Gospels is one of the most compelling figures you'll ever find, just speaking of literature, not to mention the fact we believe it's God-inspired, God's word to us. A lot of people who talk about what Jesus would say or not say or would want or not want really don't seem to have much familiarity with the Jesus we read in the Gospels. I mean, His warnings about judgment. His effusive pouring out of grace is also matched by a radical teaching about eternal consequences to our behavior and to our choices. Yeah, I mean, it's like you said, that's what makes Him so compelling, is that you have these combinations, not these "either/or"s.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, I'm glad you went this way, because one of the things that I wanted to draw attention to is something that you write on this point. You say the orthodox held tenaciously to multiple truths and fended off theological errors coming from multiple directions. As Blaise Pascal pointed out more than a thousand years later, the church has always been attacked by contrary errors. Faith embraces many apparently contradictory truths. The source of all heresies is the exclusion of certain of these truths. When I read this, my mind immediately went to another of your books that I so appreciated, *The Multi-Directional Leader: Responding Wisely to Challenges from Every Side*. In that book, whose target audience was pastors, you stressed how critical it is that spiritual leaders be vigilant of threats on all sides, whereas the tendency is often to sound warnings on one or two fronts. Something that I have appreciated about your work across the board, as I have read it and heard you, is that you are very conscientious and skillful about avoiding reductionism and false dichotomies.

Dr. Keith Plummer

And though this is bringing in another book that I didn't tell you that I necessarily was going to ask about, but it seemed to me that there is a parallel here between what you were talking about, the "both/and" of orthodoxy and the practical outworking of that, particularly as you deal with in that book, for spiritual leaders and how it is that we seek to shepherd. Can you expound on that some?

Dr. Trevin Wax

Yeah, I think you're noticing parallels there. It's in a different key, perhaps, because orthodoxy is about complementary truths. *The Multi-Directional Leader* is more about complementary dangers or threats. A lot of times, I think we can become very skillful in fending off threats to the church from one side of the field, so to speak. If we're like a shepherd in a field and we have sheep there, if we've seen wolves

come in from one side of the field, we can become very skillful at fighting them off, fending them off, warning the sheep about the wolves from that side of the field. But generally speaking, there's lots of different ways that error can creep into the church. It doesn't just happen through one door. It doesn't just happen through one side. One of the things you've got to be aware of is that there can be errors that creep in from other directions. Sometimes you can be so focused on one particular danger for the church that you actually step back and fall into a different ditch, so to speak. And so *The Multi-Directional Leader* book was... It's not necessarily a book saying that everybody needs to try to be perfectly multi-directional and attuned to every kind of danger that could possibly be out there that could affect one's congregation.

Dr. Trevin Wax

I don't think that that's possible, I don't think that's even necessarily something we should pursue. But recognizing that you need a sensibility that's able to recognize dangers from different directions will put you in community with people who may see things a little differently than you or may be more attuned to some dangers that you're not attuned to, that you're then able to sharpen your own senses a bit. *Multi-Directional Leader*, I know the way I've just presented it here, it could sound somewhat defensive, but there is a place for shepherds defending the flock and shepherds doing that work of defense. It's not only that, because there's a proactive and a positive vision for *Multi-Directional Leader*. But at the very least, it is that, though. It is to be on guard against different kinds of dangers that the church can face.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Years ago, I heard Christian ethicist David Horner from Biola, he said something that really stuck with me, and he said that you will never rationally, and for the long haul, say no to something that is very attractive to you without saying yes to something better. You said something about going back to the issue of the importance of details of theology. You said something that reminded me of that strain of thought—Christians should care about the finer details of theology, not because we want to hunt for heretics or whack anyone whose perspectives are slightly out of line, but out of the desire to preserve something life-giving and to maintain certain conditions necessary for freedom and flourishing. We're not just concerned about accuracy for the sake of saying no to things, but because we want to preserve the yes. You use, as an illustration of this, the doctrine of original sin, which at first seems somewhat maybe counterintuitive. How is the doctrine of original sin a necessary condition for freedom and flourishing?

Dr. Trevin Wax

It seems like that would be a downer of a doctrine to use for that, but that's one of the reasons I picked it. The idea of the innate selfishness and sinfulness of human beings on the surface sounds like that would actually be inhibiting. But in reality, it's necessary for true freedom to flourish, because without it, we will try all sorts of schemes to lead to some kind of perfectibility when it comes to human nature. And you will wind up having to... I mean, and you see this, most of the totalitarian regimes that we've seen in the world, I mean, all the way from the French Revolution to today in China and whatnot in other places, they're built on a faulty assumption of human nature, thinking that man is inherently good or can become inherently good. The way that we can do that is by bringing down the full force of the law, we can perfect the communist man, or we can perfect that. These are doctrines or beliefs that have a real impact in how governments function and our view of humanity. But there are other aspects of original sin as well. So you have more freedom because if you believe that humans are innately selfish, then you have more freedom to flourish because you recognize you have chastened expectations as to what your political cause is going to pull off.

Dr. Trevin Wax

You recognize that, at times, even reforms need reforming. Even the scalpels we use for a surgery need sterilizing and whatnot. But there's other beautiful aspects of that. There's something beautiful about the way it levels everybody. The king and the peasant, both together, are wired the same way. Where innately, I would say the wires have gone wrong, I should say, because initially we weren't wired that way, we weren't created that way. But we all have that distorted effect because of our proclivity to sin. And that equalizes everyone. That levels everyone, puts us all on the same playing field. There's no room for boasting in that. So there's all sorts of ways that these doctrines, on the surface,

they can look really—they can look negative. But when you actually begin to peel back the layers as to what are the implications of some of these doctrines, then you recognize there's so much room for freedom there.

Dr. Keith Plummer

As we're closing down, one of the things that I wanted to ask you about is a project that you are working on via audio, and that is the podcast *Reconstructing Faith*. I've listened to the episodes that have been out there—really, really benefited from them. I wanted to give you an opportunity to tell folks what that's about and what you're seeking to accomplish with it.

Dr. Trevin Wax

Yes. We recently wrapped up the first season. It's a 12-episode, documentary-style podcast. If you like *This American Life* or *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill* or things like that, where you have clips and music and interviews and commentary and all that put together, that's the gist of it. It's a documentary-style podcast that is really focused on this moment as a moment for rebuilding, for rebuilding the credibility of the church's witness, rebuilding the church after quite a number of problems have been put out there. It really was a labor of love. It was a difficult project to work on, and we're right now thinking about what a second season might look like. But it really was a labor of love in the sense that it was about us wanting to step in with something constructive. To say, "Okay, the church is going to be here 50 years from now. We know that. What's it going to look like?" Because the decisions we make in the next decade are going to affect what the church looks like. If we ache for the church, it's because we love the church and we want to see the church be a better reflection of Jesus.

Dr. Trevin Wax

Through a mix of clips and audio and interviews and music and all sorts of things, I'm hoping that it's a really compelling journey through some the major issues the church is facing, whether it be social media, or race, or purity culture, or political engagement, sex abuse crises, the American Dream, all these things. The goal behind it was to say, what does a faithful Christian witness look like? How can we remove the rot that we see in the church today, but also fortify the foundations so that we have something to build on as we move into the future?

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, as I said, really appreciate it. It's well-produced, but beyond that, the content is honest but also appropriately hopeful because of the gospel, and I'm very grateful for it. If people want to follow you and some of your musings and writings and so forth, what's the best way to do that?

Dr. Trevin Wax

Probably the best way is just to go to my column at *The Gospel Coalition*. If you just go to trevinwax.com, it will take you there. But at the end of every post, I have a way to sign up to an email for subscribers, and that's what I generally do. It just doesn't cost anything. But I like to share some book recommendations there, sometimes some classic TV clips because that's one of my hobbies. So just articles, things I'm writing or reading or whatnot, I like to share there. I think that's probably the best place to go.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, I have been speaking with Trevin Wax about his latest book, *The Thrill of Orthodoxy: Rediscovering the Adventure of Christian Faith*. It is one that I hope many people will pick up and read with care. I just really appreciate it, Trevin. Thank you again for the time. It was a real pleasure to be able to talk with you about it. And thank you for your work.

Dr. Trevin Wax

Well, thank you so much for having me on. It's an honor.

Ben Best, Co-host

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