

Barricades to Apostasy

New Evangelicalism

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Bible Text: 2 John 10-11

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Many commentators refer to the apostle John as the apostle of love. And those who seek to emphasize the subject of love gravitate to John's writings as opposed to those of Paul or of Peter. However, any careful student of Paul's epistles would have to admit that Paul spends a substantial portion of his time developing the theme of the love of God for sinners. In Romans, particularly, he made a major point of relating the love of God for us to the death of Christ for us.

But those who favor John over Paul generally do so out of the mistaken idea that John was not so rigid in his doctrine as was Paul. After all, they say, John was the apostle who wrote that God is love and they can hardly imagine Paul uttering such a {?}. Many theological liberals have tended to quote certain statements from the writings of John as support for a broad minded approach to expounding doctrine, meaning broad enough to all of or all kinds of heretical views. But if they would be more honest they would find their way to statements in the epistles of John like the one that we find at chapter four in the first epistle, the very beginning of that chapter.

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”¹

That doesn't sound very broad to me. If anything, John's emphasis was even stricter than that of Paul. There is a persistent emphasis in John's writings on the relationship between love and the truth. And it is this connection that often gets lost today. In the opening words of the epistle that we read this evening we find that John's love for those to whom he wrote was grounded in the truth. The strong implication of his words is that there can be no true love without the truth. And what is the truth? It is the truth about Christ. It is the truth who is Christ. In the first century churches were facing situations like those we confront today. They face heretics of various descriptions.

Now hospitality has always been a hallmark of Christian testimony. And so the feeling was that they needed to entertain people of every description and generally that is a good policy. But the heretics use that hospitality as a cover under which—remember what

¹ 1 John 4:1.

Peter said?—they crept in unawares. Under that cover they sought to inject their pernicious views into the minds of those who were in the church. So John's response was emphatic. Know what the truth is. Know what you believe. Be thoroughly familiar. You have got to learn to recognize that which is a departure from it, that which is an assault upon it.

Now he didn't mean that they had to immerse themselves in the study of heresy. He wasn't saying, "Make it a study, make it your avocation to study the pagan philosophers so that you can recognize heresy. What meant was that if they knew the truth well, they will be able to identify that which was a departure from it. So in the words of our text this evening, the apostle John gave the divinely inspired method in which the Church was to be protected against the attacks of the heretics and apostates. They were to note those who did not abide in the doctrine of Christ and they were to have nothing to do with them, not even to wish them well. He was trying to underscore the serious nature of the situation, the serious nature of the biblical doctrine of separatism. He was saying that even what would seem to be a most innocent and innocuous greeting would open the door to the invasion of apostasy. So John was telling them that the danger was real and could only be avoided, as we have seen, by the most intense vigilance.

Nothing could be more important than to safeguard the Church's testimony from the assaults of the heretics and the apostates and those who compromised with them.

So in this text the inspired apostle is arguing for the erection of a strong wall of separation between the truth and the lie. He was not urging here cooperation or dialog. He was saying that the people of God should identify that which is against Christ and should strive against that with all of their energy, to stand for Christ, to stand with Christ is to be against that which is antichrist.

Really in our text this evening the inspired apostle was issuing a call. It was a call of the people of God to take their positions at what I call the barricades to apostasy. Now many proponents of what they call the new evangelicalism in our own time would like you to believe that a text like this one is to be interpreted very narrowly. For their whole strategy is cooperation, conciliation, dialog, recognition of heretics and liberals as belonging to the Christian community.

There is a very striking editorial in a magazine—I don't even know if it is still being published—called *The Christian Century*. It was the official mouth piece of Modernism during the early years of the last century. And on January the second, 1924, there appeared this analysis of the situation at that time. Christianity according to Fundamentalism is one religion. Christianity according to Modernism is another religion. Which is the true religion is the question that is to be settled in all probability by our generation for future generations. There is a clash here as profound and as grim as between Christianity and Confucianism. Amiable words cannot hide these differences. Blessed by the tie may be sung till doomsday, but it cannot bind these worlds together. The God of the Fundamentalists is one God. The God of the Modernists is another. The Bible of Fundamentalism is one Bible. The Bible of Modernism is another. The Church,

the Kingdom, the consummation of all things, these are one thing the Fundamentalists and another thing to Modernists. Which God is the Christian God? Which Christ is the Christian Christ? Which Bible is the Christian Bible? Which church? Which kingdom? Which salvation? Which consummation are the Christian Church, the Christian kingdom, the Christian salvation, the Christian consummation? The future will tell.

Interesting, is it not, to ask the question: Which Christ is the Christian Christ? Well, the Scriptures warn us even as Jon does that there will be many false Christs gone out into the world.

So there they were in 1924 admitting the battle, admitting the conflict. And those words appear to be wiser to us than the words of those who came along just less than 25 years later to argue for a new policy of infiltration and cooperation, for a policy of getting together and exploring common ground instead of the old policy of confrontation and separation.

Now the battle to which that editorial alluded in 1924 was won largely by the Fundamentalists. They refused to give way. And that fact has been forgotten. So the enemy throws a different tactic. Since to confront the defenders of biblical truth openly had resulted in the triumph of biblical truth, perhaps another tactic would result in a different outcome. We are seeking to understand the foundation of the scriptural doctrine of separatism as a basis on which to examine the whole atmosphere of weakness and compromise that abounds in the religious world in which we live in the second decade of the 21st century.

Now it is very timely that we should come to these very words this evening, because last Monday the world was shocked by the announcement from Vatican City that the pope is going to resign as of the end of this month. Now there are a number of ironies associated with that. I tried to suggest some of that in what I wrote in the bulletin for today's services. But one of the ironies is that in the aftermath of that announcement some, so called evangelicals, have taken to praising Benedict XVI for his theological conservatism and his commitment to conservative morality. And it all sounds very nice. But this is the very man who has set himself up as the vicar of Christ, who in the language of the New Testament has set himself in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

I also reflect on the irony that deluded followers of Roman Catholicism had to confront the reality of their own history that there was a time, 600 years ago, when there were not one or two, but three popes in Europe, each one of them claiming to be the vicar of Christ and each one pronouncing anathemas and excommunications against the others and forcing the people who worked in the fields and in the towns to try to decide which of them was the real one, no I mean the real one.

And then, of course, the solution of that at the Council of Constance in 1415 was not only to consign to death at the stake John Hus, but also to compel the resignations of the existing popes. And that was the last time a pope resigned, Gregory XII resigned in 1415.

John XXIII as I like to refer to him, was not permitted to resign. He was declared to be unpoped for that he had never been a pope at all and he was put in prison.

So Roman Catholics had to confront their own facts during the days of this last week.

But this text tonight is summoning us to the barricades that Scripture has erected against apostasy and we do well to heed the call. So now let's come to the first of the barricades, indentifying the conflict that will arise.

Verse 10 begins with the word if and the force of the word is that this situation is going to occur at some point. So you had better be ready for it. Notice the word any.

“If there come any unto you...”²

So there is a word that refers to anyone regardless of his prominence or his supposed recognition in the Christian community. It doesn't matter who he is or how wide his following is. If anyone comes to you and meets the qualifications of this text, then the condition is to be fulfilled.

So here is a word that extends to professing Christians, but also to members of cults like Russellism and Mormonism and anyone else. They come to the Church collectively, they come to the people of the Church individually. And their goal is to cause divisions and defections in the body of Christ.

Let's go back to that text we considered last Lord's Day, Romans chapter 16 and verse 17.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.³

Not going to go over what we considered in connection with that text, but here John is saying are these very people coming to cause divisions. They do not bring with them this doctrine, the doctrine of Christ of which the apostle spoke in verse nine.

“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.”⁴

What is that doctrine of Christ? Well, again, I don't have the time to enter into an exhaustive exposition, but let me just highlight the elements that really go together at least in large measure to expound the doctrine of Christ, his eternal and essential deity, his miraculous incarnation in the virgin birth, his sinless perfection in the flesh, his vicarious obedience of the law in behalf of his people and his satisfaction to the law in his

² 1 John 4:10.

³ Romans 16:17-18.

⁴ 2 John 9.

atoning death on the cross at Calvary, his bodily resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven, his second coming. All of this is the doctrine of Christ. That is not a menu where you choose that which applies to you and let that rest go.

The apostle John spoke of a situation in which someone comes to you without this doctrine. Now that may mean he comes to you with most of it, but without this point or that point. And what he is saying is that is to transgress and not abide in the doctrine of Christ. That means he is antichrist. So if that happens—and John is saying, “And it will,”—what are you to do? Well, the answer is: Come to the second barricade, understanding the conduct that is required.

John said:

“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.”⁵

So there are two things John was saying to be done. First of all, if someone comes to you without the doctrine of Christ you decline hospitality to that person. And you refuse to pronounce the Lord’s blessing on that person. You don’t say to that person, “Well, we will pray for you that God will help you in your work.” You don’t demonstrate any kindness to them at all in the sense of welcoming them or seeking to encourage them.

I believe what John meant is that you don’t invite them into your homes. You don’t welcome them as Christian brethren in your congregations.

Paul made it clear what his attitude was toward those who were not living obediently as Christians. If you turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter five and to verse 11 here he is speaking in a moral context.

“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.”⁶

So if someone is conducting himself morally in such a fashion that he transgresses the doctrine of Christ, you don’t keep company with him. You don’t even sit down to have a meal with him.

And he went even further in the last chapter of that epistle, chapter 16 and verse 22, some of the last words in the epistle.

“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.”⁷

⁵ 2 John 1:10.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:11.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 16:22.

That is, let him be condemned. And then Maranatha, behold the Lord comes. So here were the stakes, then. Here was the atmosphere as far as Paul was concerned. If a man doesn't love the Lord Jesus Christ let him be anathema. And the Lord is coming.

Turn to 2 Timothy chapter three verse five where the apostle writing to Timothy speaks about what will be in evidence in the perilous times of the last days. In verse four we read of them:

Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;
Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn
away.⁸

The apostles took a hard line when it came to these circumstances. And why was that so? Why did they take such a hard line? Well, that is the {} to the third barricade: defending the cause that is entrusted to us. It requires us, that is, the people of God in every generation, to remember that the Lord has committed to his Church a sacred trust. And what is that trust? It is the faith of which Jude writes in his epistle that has once been delivered to the saints, not a deposit, as it were, as Romanists like to speak of it, but a sacred trust. Christ has committed the faith to his people so that they may contend earnestly for it.

The danger of the warfare against that faith is real and it is grave and it is intensified. So to engage in that which the second barricade forbids, that is to accommodate those who are not abiding the doctrine of Christ is to destroy that barricade. And that destroys the barricade behind it. It is to join with those who are promoting that which is antichrist. It is to align yourself with the purposes of those who seek to undermine the pure proclamation of the doctrine of Christ and the purity of the gospel that we find in the Scriptures of truth.

So John said:

“For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”⁹

Here was that which was really at stake.

Now, again, I like to emphasize that in the New Testament world there was really not what you would consider an enclave in the midst of the society in which the believers lived, that is, they didn't have monastery, they didn't have a cloister into which they could retreat. They were out there facing this situation every day. And there were people seeking admission to their churches who were seeking to bring in false ideas, philosophical ideas. And all designed to dilute the truth of the gospel. So John raised a call to the barricade not to give aid and comfort to those against whom the people of God are called to raise the banner of the truth. Separatism, as the Scriptures present it, is with

⁸ 2 Timothy 3:4-5.

⁹ 2 John 11.

a view to the purity of the Church. It is not with a view to the Church becoming cloistered from the world, but it is with a view to maintaining that which is true.

As you look at Revelation chapter 18 and verse one:

And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.¹⁰

So it was the call to the people of God to come out and to maintain their distinction from that which had to do with heresy and corruption. And here is his barricade, then, to remember the cause entrusted to us and to resolve that we are not going to seek to dismantle that barricade, because it is the final barricade in the defense against the errors that surround us in our own time.

So hear, then, how these barricades against apostasy John is saying, “Be sure that you know the doctrine of Christ, but beyond that be sure that you value it. Be sure that you love it. Be sure that you don’t say of it, ‘That is a nice thing. That is what I profess to believe.’ Be sure that you are ready to contend of it, take your stand against those who would destroy it.”

And in our own time, in the religious world confusion is rampant and there needs, again, this call to man the barricades, to identify that which is against the truth and to take our stand against it in loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ.

May God bless his Word. May he use it to encourage our hearts to stand for him in these days.

¹⁰ Revelation 18:1-4.