

Addressing Heresy

By Dan Jensen (2023)

Whether you realize it or not, if you are an American, you have been deeply influenced by Postmodernism. If you don't know very much about this philosophy, please read the short section on it in my book on church history (pages 159-161). It can be found on my website. I cannot in this short essay cover all of the ways that Postmodernism infects new Christians, but I will cover some of the most important ones. The first is the hatred of labels. Many Americans feel that labels are used to put people in boxes and then people get discriminated against based on these boxes. Many Americans point out that no one fits neatly into any box. There is a great deal of truth to this fact, but it can be taken way too far. Labels are an essential part of language. Ultimately all words are labels that are being put on things, realities, or ideas. We cannot even speak without using labels. And when we speak about humans, things are no different whether we like this or not.

When we go to the doctor and the staff weigh us; take our height; our blood pressure; our temperature; etc.; they are placing labels on us. When the doctor gives us a diagnosis, he or she is putting a label on us. Your social security number is a label. If you are enrolled at a university, you are an official student at that university and that is a label that describes something about you. Someone can say all he or she wants that he or she is an official student at a university, but if he or she is not actually enrolled, he or she is either lying or is deluded. I understand how common it is (because of the pervasive Postmodernism of our culture) to say things like, "Well his truth is his truth." But, with the utmost respect, this is nonsense and no one actually believes this. It is impossible to go through life with this mentality. We can talk this way in casual conversation and feel good about ourselves all we want, but if someone got a job over you because he or she said that he or she had better credentials than you when in fact he or she did not, you would rightfully be mad at the injustice. And it would not make

one bit of difference if this person said, “Well, this is my truth. In my mind I do have these credentials and so I do in fact have them.”

None of this means that labels should be taken too far. Any label that describes us does not describe the totality of us. And even if you took all the legitimate labels used to describe us, one would still not truly know us. You have to actually be around someone for a long time in very intimate ways in order to truly get to know that person. But, this truth does not change the fact that labels are necessary and often very helpful in many day to day activities. And this is no different in the realm of religion and worldviews (I further define these terms in the second chapter to the first book of my “basics” series; for now think of these terms as describing what people believe about the world). One can say that he or she is a Roman Catholic (the only reason I don’t have *Catholic* in quotes here is because the term is being used as part of an official title for this religion), for example, all he or she wants, but if he or she has not been baptized and rejects Catholic theology from a very knowledgeable place, this person is not a Catholic. I’m sorry, but he or she simply is not. The Catholic Church is an actual institution and it gets to define what it believes. One does not get to define it differently merely because he or she wishes to do so. If you are unfamiliar with the Catholic Church, I provide more information on it in my “basics” series. And as we will see, according to the Bible, to be an actual Christian means something. One does not get to define it in ways that are contrary to how God defines the term.

Now, if you do go on to read my “basics” series, you will see how I talk about how I am often not going to overly judge who is a true Muslim (a Muslim is someone who holds to the religion of Islam) vs. who is not a true Muslim, as one example. Because I believe all of Islam (I provide more information on this religion in my “basics” series if you are unfamiliar with it) is false, I’m not going to get too into the debates between the various groups of Muslims. So, you may be tempted to say, “Why do you give this latitude to Muslims, but not to Catholics?” The Roman Catholic Church is an official organization, so that is the difference. There is no one organization that is known as *Islam*. But, even here there are limits. If one says that he believes that Muhammed did not exist and that

the Koran is a bad book, he is by definition not a Muslim. Historically, there is simply no way to justify his claim on any level. And even most Postmodern scholars would agree with me there, showing how inconsistent and unlivable that worldview truly is.

And many will say the same thing about “Evangelicalism” (we will unpack this term in the first book of my “basics” series). They will say that there is no one organization that is known as “Evangelicalism” and so they can define it however they want. This is not so. There are limits here, just as there are limits with Islam. If someone says that Jesus did not exist, the Bible is a bad book, and Martin Luther was a complete idiot across the board, that person is by definition not an “Evangelical” in any sense of the word. Again, even most Postmodern scholars would agree with me here. Now, when certain Liberal Protestants (the only reason I don’t put *Protestants* in quotes here is because the term is being used as part of an official title for this religion), especially Progressive Christians (the only reason I don’t put *Christians* in quotes here is because the term is being used as part of an official title for this movement), wish to loosely identify as “Evangelical,” that is fine. They have the right to do so. I think it is very annoying and causes all manner of confusion to so loosely do so, but again, they have that right. But, we also have every right to then say that we as true Christians are now going to call ourselves *Conservative Evangelicals* in order to distinguish ourselves from these Liberal Protestants, especially the Progressive Christians (all of these terms will be unpacked in the first book of my “basics” series).

The second major way that Postmodernism causes many new Christians to struggle that we will examine in this essay is it causes them to have an aversion to organized religion. Many believe that organized religions are too dogmatic. Many believe that we should never say that one religion is right while the others are not. Many believe that they produce an “us vs. them” mentality. Many also point out all of the corruption and evil that is often associated with organized religion. But, most only do this last point so as to make themselves feel better about not wanting to be part of an organized religion. In my experience, the reasons given above that point are actually usually the reasons most people in our culture don’t like organized religion. And if you do really struggle with

the corruption of organized religions, it must be said that all institutions are corrupt to one degree or another. And historically, religions have actually done a tremendous amount of good in civilizing the world. As far as Biblical Christianity in particular, you can read my book on church history when you are ready. Despite its very real warts, the true Christian church has been an enormous force for good in the world.

A number of things must be said about the problem of people not liking religion in our culture. The first is that I am not that into religion in the way that most people think of religion today. Most tend to think of religion as a list of beliefs and rituals that one must blindly believe and do. Most tend to think of people simply going through the motions in order to appease God or their “gods.” Many tend to think that religion is primarily cultural. They tend to think that most people only adopt a religion because that is how they were raised or because it is the dominant religion in their culture. I fully admit that a lot of this is true of a lot of religious people in the world. But, this is not true of me or any other true Christian. Christianity is all about having a deeply and profoundly sincere, intimate, and eternal relationship with Jesus Christ. This is why you will often hear true Christians talk about how it’s not about religion, it’s about relationship. And this is correct.

Many of you may be saying about now, “That is great! I can totally get on board with that. But, that doesn’t mean I need to join a church; or believe certain things; or do certain things; or be under the authority of a pastor or pastors. I can have my relationship with Jesus on my own.” I’m sorry, but that is not how it works. Jesus is not merely any person. While He is fully human, He is also God Almighty. You don’t get to come to Jesus on your own terms. It is not an equal relationship. He sets the terms of the relationship and you are His servant. If you don’t want to be His servant, you don’t want a relationship with Him. You may think you do, but you actually want a relationship with a “Jesus” of your own making. Jesus said in the first part of John 14:21, “Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me (NLT).” And as you will see if you go through my “basics” series, the Bible commands us to be a part of a true church; to believe certain things; to do certain things; and to be under the

authority of our pastor or pastors. And you will also see that Jesus is God as said, and that the Bible across the board is the word of God. Hence, what the Bible says, Jesus says.

The next item we will discuss in this essay that is so hard for so many new Christians to accept is the notion of heresy. This word is often used in movies, tv series, music, etc., in the mouths of bad guys who are mean; nasty; hurtful; judgmental; and overly dogmatic. These characters use it of their enemies because they want everyone to conform to their way of doing things. It is no wonder that so many new Christians cannot imagine themselves ever using the term. But no true Christian is trying to force anyone to be a Christian. No true Christian hates anyone else. True Christians love other people and seek to treat them as lovingly as possible. You may say, "No, I have known horrible Christians." Such people are by definition not true Christians.

All true Christians are saying is that most of the people throughout the world who claim some form of "Christianity," are not in fact Christians according to the Bible. And we do not say this out of hate or to exclude, but *solely* because that is what the Bible teaches. All true Christians utterly rejoice whenever anyone seems to genuinely receive the real Jesus. We don't want to exclude anyone, we want everyone to come to Jesus. But, we are honest about the fact that the Bible is clear that most will not come to the true Jesus. And none of this means we have to say that everything about every other religion is false or bad. As said above, most religions have done a great deal of good for humanity. All of them have at least some truths in them. With that made clear, all religions as whole religions are false with the sole exception of Biblical Christianity.

Before moving forward, we should first define what is meant by the term *heresy*. Some Christian theologians have used the term in different ways down through the ages, and many do so today as well. You should be aware of this. But, the way most Christian theologians have used the term, and the way I am using the term, is to describe any belief that is completely out of bounds from a biblical perspective. Most theologians (as do I) use the term *false teaching* as a synonym for *heresy*. It is important to understand

that not all errors are full-blown heresy. No true Christian has the Bible down cold. We all need to be learning and growing. We all believe things that are incorrect and we need to be open to being corrected. With that said, there are some things that are taught so clearly in the Bible, to reject these teachings is to reject the authority of the Bible itself. And to reject the authority of the Bible is to reject the authority of God Himself.

On other matters, God has not spoken as clearly. Why God did not speak with complete clarity on all matters is up to Him. But it is clear that He has not done so. On such matters, we must prayerfully do our best to come to our own conclusions. With that said, we cannot condemn our brothers and sisters in Christ over such issues, even if we think they are wrong. Even over issues where we are very, very convinced they are wrong and we strongly believe that their error is dangerous for the church, we must still accept them as our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is only over matters where we can be 100% sure that someone is wrong, can we say that someone is a heretic. A heretic is someone who claims to be a “Christian” that has embraced heresy. Those in religions that do not claim to be Christian do believe in many heresies, but we generally don’t call them heretics. We simply say that they are part of a religion that doesn’t even claim to be Christian. Groups; movements; churches; religions; and organizations that claim to be “Christian” but embrace heresy are called *heretical*. And we should only call someone a heretic, or a group heretical, with sadness and great caution. It must be abundantly clear beyond all doubt that a person or group has believed something that goes wildly against the Bible. And we can only say that when someone is believing this from a place of knowledge. If someone is confused or has not been taught very well or has not studied the Bible a great deal, he or she may believe something heretical while still not actually being a heretic. The key is, is this person open to correction? If he or she is, then he or she is not a heretic.

Teaching that is simply off but does not rise to the level of heresy should simply be called error, bad teaching, bad doctrine (*doctrine* is just a more formal and technical term for *teaching*), etc. I understand that this may be confusing because if a teaching is

wrong, is it not also false? Should it not then also be called false teaching? The answer is no because technically we are saying that in our opinion (sometimes our very strong opinion) it is false. We cannot be absolutely certain though. We could be wrong and the teaching may in fact be correct. Hence, the fully technical term *false teaching* should only be reserved for heresy.

I understand how hard all of this heresy talk is to swallow if you are a new Christian in America. I hated it when I first started to read the Bible and go to church regularly. Even after truly becoming a Christian, I still struggled with it a great deal. And our culture has only become far more Postmodern since then and so I can only imagine how hard it is for new converts in America today. But, as you read the Bible, it will become clear to you that there is no avoiding this topic. I cannot give all of the examples of this here, but we will look at two very quickly to more than make the point. Please read all of Galatians 1 and Revelation 2 (I recommend reading from the New Living Translation; you can go online to Bible Gateway to get the Bible for free if you don't have one). These chapters are only two examples (there are many, many others) of the fact that God does not consider everyone to be a true Christian who claims to be one. Many who claim to be "Christian" teach things that are completely out of bounds. You should also notice from Revelation 2 that God is not hesitant to label these teachers and groups.

You may say, "I'm sorry, I just can't accept all of this." That is fine, but that means you are not a Bible-believing Christian. And my works are not going to be pleasant for you. You may say, "Ok, I reluctantly have to admit that some who claim to be 'Christians' are not. But, that does not mean that most who claim to be 'Christian' are not." If you read my "basics" series, you will see that most people in the world who claim to be "Christian" are actually not, according to the Bible. You may say, "None of this seems very loving and I thought as Christians we should strive to be the most loving people of all. In fact, aren't we supposed to love all people unconditionally? Even further, aren't we supposed to not judge people according to Jesus?" Again, this is just the Postmodern influence talking. The idea that the only way to love people is to affirm them is actually rather absurd (no offense). People believe in and engage in self-destructive ideas and

behavior all the time. The most loving thing to do when this happens is not to affirm them. Now, this does not mean we have to lack tact. We should be very careful when we have to tell people things they don't want to hear. But, honesty is not unloving. I say much more about biblical love towards the end of my "basics" series. So, I encourage you to keep plugging forward. And I address the very abused truth on unconditional love in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*.

And as far as not judging, this simply means don't judge the heart of someone else. Don't feel like you are better than this person as you don't know all what he or she has been through. It is always so important that we check our motives. When you tell someone that he or she believes in things God condemns, do you say that to feel superior or because you deeply love him or her and desperately want to see him or her saved by Jesus? If it is the former, you are violating the godly principle concerning avoiding the judgment of others. If it is the latter, you are acting in love. To say nothing at all because you know the other person will perceive you as judgmental is to hate this other person and love yourself. It has nothing to do with you not wanting to be judgmental and everything to do with your own selfishness.

Before wrapping up, I know a lot of you may be saying, "I don't get this. Doesn't God want us to be ourselves? Shouldn't we be authentic people who don't just conform to some religion?" You need to understand that all of this is Postmodern language. It is not biblical language. The Bible from beginning to end condemns syncretism. Syncretism is the blending of religions. God's people are always prone to blending unbiblical elements from their culture with God's pure truth. It was a massive problem for the Israelites and it has been a massive problem throughout church history. A lot of American Christians see "Christians" from other countries engaging in harsh practices, such as self-crucifixion and female circumcision, and think that syncretism is only a problem for people in other cultures. I assure you after walking with Jesus for over 22 years now, and intensely studying the Bible for that same amount of time, that it is not. American Christians today are often every bit as syncretistic as Christians elsewhere in the world.

Only in different ways. And the most common way today, especially for younger Christians, is with Postmodernism.

God does want us to be ourselves and to be authentic people. God does not want us to be liars and He wants us to shine in the basic personalities He has given us. If you are an extrovert, be an extrovert. If you are an introvert, be an introvert. If you are loud and boisterous, be loud and boisterous. If you are quiet, be quiet. If you like comedies, enjoy comedies. If you enjoy dramas, enjoy dramas. If you enjoy spicy food, enjoy spicy food. If you enjoy fruit, enjoy fruit. If you love to surf, surf. If you love to quilt, quilt. The list goes on and on.

With all that made plain, you need to understand that we live in a fallen world. The Bible is absolutely clear about this. And part of this fallen world is that we ourselves fell horribly as well. In fact, we are fallen because our first parents rejected God and the Bible is clear that all of us would have done the same thing. Hence, we are actually the root cause of this fallen world. We are frighteningly guilty before the perfect God. And our fall entails our bodies and our souls. There is a lot about us that is not right and not in accord with how God first created human beings. And when the Bible tells you that something about you is not right and good, you have no right to embrace that something. In this sense, we are not to embrace ourselves, we are to deny ourselves and take up our cross as Jesus said (Matthew 10:37-39). And part of denying ourselves is denying the things about our upbringing and culture that we love so much and often think we cannot live without, but that go blatantly against God's word.

You may say, "You don't understand the consequences that will come my way if I do what you are saying. My family might ostracize me; my friends might reject me; I could lose my spouse; I could lose my job; and the list goes on." I am genuinely not trying to be harsh or unsympathetic at all. Believe me, I have experienced many of these very things and it is very difficult. Having said that, all of these consequences are nothing compared to what millions of true Christians have had to endure because of their relationship with Jesus, both today and throughout church history. We need to not make

excuses. True Biblical Christianity is precious. It is not to be watered down to fit our preferences. It is precious because Jesus Christ is precious. It is not about you and it is not about me. It is about Him, PERIOD. We are to submit to what He says in His word, the Bible, in order to fully glorify Him no matter how tough that is for us. Postmodernism is diametrically opposed to biblical truth. It is evil. Stop embracing it and nail it to the cross.