

# Fighting Over Words? Apollos Versus Postmodern Christianity

## Acts 18:27-28

By Phillip G. Kayser 8-17-2008

“...he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.”

### Intro

Before we move on to chapter 19, I had one more message that I wanted to bring from chapter 18. Many of us have friends in the Emerging Church Movement (sometimes called the Emergent Church Movement), and I thought that the last two verses of this chapter form a very nice summary of the differences between the Christianity of the Bible and that of a lot of Postmodern Christianity. With dozens of Emergent Church books in the local Christian bookstores, and with endorsements from well-known evangelicals like Rick Warren, this is not an issue that can be ignored.

This struck me with real force two weeks ago when a friend of mine in missions shocked me by vigorously defending the Emerging Church movement. At one point he said, “Most of the people I know in these circles are deeply faithful and profoundly committed to authentic expressions of Christianity.”<sup>1</sup> In my interactions with this friend I came to realize that he has been greatly influenced by postmodern thinking. I’ve been kind of grieving. And over the past few weeks I have begun to realize that the Emergent Church heresy is not a marginal movement, but is creeping into every nook and cranny of Christendom and infecting even orthodox denominations. It seems to fit in well with the thinking of government schooled kids who have been steeped in postmodernist thinking. It has become especially attractive to those who would tell Apollos, “Let’s not fight over theology. Let’s just love one another. Doctrine divides, love unites.” Just this past week I read this: “Creeds, they say, are dungeons for the old; catechisms are fetters for the young; and doctrine in general, at least if precise and defined, is inconsistent with liberty of thought and expansion of intellect.” We are living in a world that does not want to be pinned down on what it believes. It certainly is uncomfortable with the kind of debates over truth that you find in the book of Acts. On



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<sup>1</sup> Email received 7-25, 2008.

Wednesday I saw a billboard that said, “Christianity a life, not a dogma.” It could just as well have said, “Christianity is love, not rigid theology; it is relationship, not creed; it is mystical experience not stuffy preaching.” But as we will see this morning, you cannot properly *define* love, godly relationship or safe experiences without theology.

## I. Verbal, propositional truth (vv. 27-28; Acts 1-28)

And so the first thing that I want you to notice about this section is that *words* were important to Apollos, as was the *meaning* of those words. They were important enough to fight over. He didn't take the perspective that what the Jews believed was good for them, and what he believed was good for him. It was important in verse 27 that other people believe the right words, and it was important to him in verse 28 to refute words that were wrong. In a nutshell, he believed in propositional truth – that sentences really can be categorized as true or false.

Apparently that is becoming radical in today's environment. Confessions of Faith are considered arrogant and authoritarian. When you speak of the truth of Scripture, they immediately ask, “Whose view of truth? The Baptists, the Roman Catholics, the Presbyterians, the Mormons?” They don't say this to give humility about our limited knowledge but to say that Scripture cannot be knowable and that there is no certainty in any knowledge. As McMahan words it,

They teach that you really can't understand the Bible, nor are you supposed to. Rather you need to experience it; it's not what God says, but how you feel about it; its content is to be received ... subjectively or experientially.

They believe that preaching or teaching Bible doctrines is too authoritarian, so they turn to conversation ... about the Bible – and [in many emergent churches] that replaces teaching from the pulpit.<sup>2</sup>

One of the constant themes that I see in their literature is that it is arrogant to think that someone is right and another is wrong. Apparently Apollos was arrogant! They believe that truth should not be seen as a fixed, unchanging thing, but as dynamic and growing. Al Mohler rightly complains about Brian McLaren when he says,

“... As a postmodernist, he considers himself free from any concern for propositional truthfulness, and simply wants the Christian community to embrace a pluriform understanding of truth as a way out of doctrinal conflict and impasse.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://truth4christ.blogspot.com/2008/04/dangers-of-emergent-church.html>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.almohler.com/commentary\\_read.php?cdate=2005-02-16](http://www.almohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2005-02-16)

They speak of conversation, but not debate; dialogue, but not certainty. McLaren wrote, “[t]he gospel is made credible not by how we argue and make truth claims.”<sup>4</sup> Apparently he disagreed with the approach of Apollos (who did just that). Apollos should have entered into a conversation where no one is wrong and everyone grows. David Bosch states,

“The ‘old, old story’ may not be the true, true story, for we continue to grow, and even our discussion and dialogues contribute to such growth. In other words, the questions raised by postmodernism help us to grow.”<sup>5</sup>

Now they don’t sprinkle all the pages with statements like that or it would make evangelicals nervous. But it is clear from their writings that these men are utterly skeptical of truth claims. They are skeptical that words can be the foundation of Christianity. They are skeptical of preaching that has any ring of certainty about it.

But words have always been important to God, and the Bible calls for confident preaching. As Mark Driscoll, one of the chief critics of the Emerging Church, said,

“God is the first preacher. God proclaimed, God said, God said, God said, and life came from it. Preaching brings life. Genesis 3 shows us that God is not the only preacher. The serpent preaches as well.”<sup>6</sup>

So it’s not an issue of preaching or no preaching. It’s an issue of right preaching that conforms to God’s Word. It’s not an issue of words or no words. They give words! It’s an issue of right words, as measured by the Bible.

Why is this relevant to all of us? Because, even though we are not an emergent church, and in one sense I am preaching to the choir, we may still fail on these points just as the emergent church does. Obviously we don’t *theologically* fail by buying into their view on words, but some of us *act* as if doctrines and words are not that critical. Have we grown weary of the debates that started in the New Testament? The Bible calls us to reverence God’s Words, to live by them, cherish them, study them, meditate upon them, to fight for them, and be transformed by them. We may not hold to the heresy of the emergent church, but do we treat the words of Scripture with the same passion and seriousness that Apollos did? Deuteronomy 32 says, **“Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law. For it is not a futile thing for you,**

<sup>4</sup> <http://fajita.wordpress.com/2006/07/>

<sup>5</sup> As quoted by D.A. Carson in, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Driscoll, <http://undergraceinaustin.wordpress.com/2008/03/09/resurgence-text-context-putting-pastors-in-their-place-by-mark-driscoll/>

because it *is* your life, and by this word you shall prolong *your* days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess.” (vv. 46-47). Moses said, these words are your life.

Contrary to the objections that words, doctrine, and preaching are sterile and lifeless, Scripture says, “**Your Word has given me life**” (Psalm 119:50), and speaks of “**the comfort of the Scriptures**” (Rom. 15:4) and that salvation comes through preaching (Rom. 10:10-18). Hebrews 4:12 says, “**the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.**” My first application in this sermon is that we must do better than the Emergents – we must at least act as if God’s word is living and life giving and our most precious possession. If we really believed that, we would memorize it, meditate upon it and make it our life.

## II. Practical (“he greatly helped” - v. 27)

Secondly, we need to see that truth and doctrine are practical. Some people think that doctrine is irrelevant. But verse 27 says that when this anti-Postmodernist came into Corinth with his spiritual revolver blazing, “**he greatly helped those who had believed through grace.**” And he did it through his doctrinal debates. How did it help them? It gave believers confidence in the certainty of their faith; it gave them a foundation on which to stand; it gave them a worldview that enabled them to think Christianly; it transformed their lives because it was God’s truth. A postmodernist might look at the alienation that the unbelieving Jews felt, and say that this doctrine of Apollos was not practical. It didn’t achieve unity. But we must look to the Scripture to define what is useful or practical rather than our own human reason. Though most of the Jews were alienated, the Bible would describe Apollos’ work as a success.

If you want to see the incredibly practical results of the doctrines of Jesus and the Trinity upon Western civilization, read Rushdoony’s book, *The Foundations of Social Order*. The ecumenical creeds transformed society and civil government and produced most of the liberties that the West has enjoyed. To say that such doctrines are not practical is slander. To see some of the other ways in which what we believe impacts every area of life, listen to my series on the Trinity. Luke is making no exaggeration when he says of Apollos that “**he greatly helped**” them. His doctrine helped them.

## III. Relational (“those who had believed” – v. 27)

Another thing we find in this passage is that there is quite a difference between the Jews and “**those who had believed.**” The Jews were out of the kingdom and “those who had believed” (throughout the book of Acts) are

treated as in the kingdom. Emergent Church leaders are very nervous about such exclusionary language of “believers” versus “unbelievers.” As Dr. Sam Storms worded it, “They dislike the way this biblical reality compels them to speak of 'who's in' and 'who's out'. They feel it requires an act of discernment and judgment that only the arrogant and self-assured can make.”<sup>7</sup> Yet Scripture mandates that we do exactly that every time we preach the Gospel, every time we serve communion and every time we exercise discipline, every time we marry off one of our children. We’ve got to distinguish between who’s in and who’s out. The Emerging Church’s concept of relational is quite different – it is not offending Buddhists, Muslims and others, but entering into dialogue and conversation with them. They insist that “doctrine divides and love unites,” but they fail to define love, discipleship, kingdom, “followers of Jesus,” church and many other terms from the Bible. Brian McLaren said,

I don’t believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all!) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus *and* remain within their Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish contexts ... rather than resolving the paradox via pronouncements on the eternal destiny of people more convinced by or loyal to other religions than ours, we simply move on ... To help Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and everyone else experience life to the full in the way of Jesus (while learning it better myself), I would gladly become one of them (whoever they are), to whatever degree I can, to embrace them, to join them, to enter into their world without judgment but with saving love as mine has been entered by the Lord.”<sup>8</sup>

They speak of relationship with the world and the whole cosmos, but it is achieved by tearing down the walls of protection around Jerusalem and including Sanballat and Tobiah. Read Nehemiah if you don’t know who they are. They were offended that they were not included as insiders by the Jews. But Scripture speaks of a much more profound relationship that exists within the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem, and it is only as we love one another enough to serve, to exhort, to lay down our lives for each other and even on occasion to exercise discipline - that we can sustain such fellowship. We have already seen in Acts 2:40-47 and other passages that there was incredible relationship going on within the church, and this great debate that Apollos engaged in did not hinder such relationship; it helped tighten such relationship among the disciples.

Now here is the question: “Does the Emergent Church have a valid objection when they say that the evangelical church has failed to have

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Sam Storms, on <http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/why-were-not-emergent-by-two-guys-who-should-be-4/>

<sup>8</sup> Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy, A Generous Orthodoxy*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. 293.

authentic relationships?” In many cases, yes. Unfortunately yes. And if we are to be a shining testimony to this post-modern world, it is imperative that we practice the truths of relationship that are found in the Bible. Those truths do not just emphasize the fact that no one comes to the Father except through Christ. They also emphasize the fact that no one can claim to love the Father if he does not love the brethren. Let’s make it our goal to show such love for the brethren both in our church and to the brethren in the broader Biblical church that the emergent critique would fall to the ground.

#### **IV. Rational (“who had believed...for” – v. 27,28)**

The next part of verse 27 indicates that we have a rational faith. It speaks not of those who are authentic, but **“those who had believed.”** And why did they believe? The word “for” at the beginning of verse 28 indicates that it was because Apollos had preached a rational, intelligent faith that made clear distinctions between right and wrong, heresy and orthodoxy. It was belief, not feelings that got them saved. It was belief, not feelings that distinguished them from the Jews. It was belief, not feelings that were at the foundation of Christianity. Contrast that with the following statement by Brian McLaren:

As we move beyond modernity, we lose our infatuation with analysis, knowledge, information, ‘facts,’ and belief systems — and those who traffic in them. Instead we are attracted to leaders who possess that elusive quality of wisdom (think of James 3:??), who practice spiritual disciplines, and whose lives are characterized by depth of spiritual practice (not just by the tightness of belief system).<sup>9</sup>

What he is advocating is replacing a rational system of doctrine with an undefined relationship with God. Now I am all for a relationship with God. That’s not the issue. The issue is that concepts such as relationship, wisdom, spiritual, experience and love need to be defined by the Bible. And the reason I say this is that many of the mystical experiences that these emergent leaders talk about sound more akin to Buddhist experience, and some of them (like those at the Labyrinth of Prayer circle) are downright demonic. Yet evangelical Christians flock to hear these so-called evangelical gurus. They long for the overwhelming experiences that they hear about at Contemplative Prayer circles. And they get sucked in. Experience that is not grounded in Scripture can lead us astray so easily. Consider the ridiculous extremes that experience has led Tony Campolo to. He said,

“Beyond these models of reconciliation, a theology of mysticism provides some hope for common ground between Christianity and Islam. Both religions have

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<sup>9</sup> Brian McLaren *Adventures in Missing the Point*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), p. 144. Also recorded at Brian McLaren’s website: <http://www.brianmclaren.net/emc/archives/imported/dorothy-on-leadership.html>.

within their histories examples of ecstatic union with God... [That's what they are longing for – “ecstatic union with God” He goes on...] I do not know what to make of the Muslim mystics, especially those who have come to be known as the Sufis. What do they experience in their mystical experiences? Could they have encountered the same God we do in our Christian mysticism?”<sup>10</sup>

That is Tony Campolo who speaks in so many evangelical churches. But what does Jesus pray? He prayed that His elect will know the truth and be united in the truth. He prayed for a rational religion. He says, **“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent... For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.”** (John 17:3,8-10) The apostles were not given skepticism, but certain knowledge. They were not given a false unity with the world, but a real unity with each other based on the Word. There was no call for unity based on experience but a rational unity based on the truth. And let me give you a warning here - any experience (whether emergent church, contemplative movement, charismatic, Reformed experiences, Deepak Chopra's yoga type meditation – any experience) that takes you away from rationality, that blanks out the mind, that bypasses the mind or dumbs you down is not of the Spirit. The Spirit illuminates our minds. He spreads light, not confusion. 1 Corinthians 12-14 constantly emphasizes the importance of understanding and knowledge. Paul's prayer for unity was the same. His theology of unity in Ephesians 4 was the same. Here's what he longed for: **“...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him, who is the head – Christ...”** (Eph. 4:11-15). To exchange a rational faith for a mystical something is to throw out Christianity. From beginning to end, the Christian faith is rational. And the early church of the first three centuries rejected the irrational mysticism of the heretics. They recognized the danger.

How can we learn from this? First, we must make sure that we are not content to live with contradictions in our faith and living. It is not honoring to God to embrace irrationality. Teach your children logic. Teach them doctrine. Help them to be experts in the catechism. Teach them

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<sup>10</sup> Tony Campolo, *Speaking My Mind*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004, pp.149-150

rhetoric and how to refute error. They are going to have a lot of practice in their growing up years because error is everywhere. Teach them apologetics and worldview and how to discern truth from error. Teach them to be rational. Don't allow our post-modern culture to make us intellectually lazy. Glory in the modern debaters like Apollos. Glory in the ancient theologians like Apollos. Glory in the fact that we have a rational faith.

## V. Supernatural (“through grace” – v. 27)

But it is not enough to have a rational faith. If we believe the Bible, our rational faith forces us to also believe that it is a supernatural faith. This is where the older liberals went wrong. They left rational thinking (which begins with God's mind) and embraced rationalistic thinking (which begins with man's mind) and in the process lost true rationality. They denied the existence of miracles or anything that could not be scientifically explained. Science couldn't explain angels and demons, so they denied their existence. The emergent church has gone to the other extreme and is buying into irrational supernaturalism; demonic supernaturalism. So let's look at this.

Verse 27 is a thoroughly Calvinistic verse. It speaks of “**those who had believed through grace.**” Their belief was a gift of God's grace. In fact, the depravity of human hearts makes it clear that no one could believe if God had not supernaturally changed their hearts. We already read about Lydia some months ago. Acts 16:14 says, “**The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.**” God didn't do violence to her heart; He opened her heart. But He irresistibly drew her to Himself. Without such supernatural grace salvation would be impossible. In Matthew 19 Jesus made clear that it would be easier for you to thread a camel through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved. Modern socialists only read so far. But the apostles caught the significance of what Christ said. They responded, “Who then can be saved” (v. 25). If a rich man can't be saved, how can any of us be saved? Jesus replied, “**With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**” With men what is impossible? What the disciples had been surprised by – that anyone could be saved. It is impossible. Jesus said, “**No one can come to Me unless the Father who has sent Me draws him**” (John 6:44). That is the supernatural Gospel – that it is all of grace, all of Christ and all to God's glory. God's supernatural opens up our minds to understand the Word and to understand the world in the light of His Word.

But when the emergent church leaders speak of supernatural, they are speaking of something totally different. They are speaking of something that



is more akin to Buddhist and New Age concepts of supernatural. It is not sovereign grace that captures their hearts. In fact, most of them reject sovereign grace and embrace Arminianism, full-blown Pelagianism or Openness of God Theology. Their version of supernatural is (in some cases) TM, inner contemplation, visualization, art, yoga, smoke, or the theories of Deepak Chopra and other New Age practitioners. And neither Leonard Sweet, Brian McLaren nor Jerry Haselmayer (who coauthored a book), have any problem with that. They said, “If modern western Christianity has become overly dualistic, might a measured dose of Zenlike monism help correct our hyperdualism?”<sup>11</sup>

There are three problems with this statement. The first is that they can even think of Western Christianity as being overly dualistic. Scripture speaks of two distinct realities: God and creation, and insists that God is so transcendent that there is a huge gap between the two. There is a Creator/creature distinction. That is dualism. Hyperdualism would see no relationship between the two. But the moment we speak of a Creator-Sustainer-Ruler, hyperdualism is rejected. The solution to hyperdualism is not monism, but the immanence of the transcendent God. The second problem is seeing any helpfulness in Zen Buddhism. God has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness in His Word and by His grace (1 Pet. 1:2-4). Why go to another source when the Scripture are sufficient to make the man of God “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17)? The third problem is their willingness to embrace any kind of monism. Monism by definition does away with the Creator/creature distinction. It might be thought that this is just being said for rhetorical effect. However, the more literature you read by these authors, the more you will see that they *are* monistic. Peter Jones has written some helpful literature exposing the monism in the movement. Yet emergent Christians are flocking to New Age writers and speakers like Deepak Chopra and other yoga practitioners. The emergent church has opened the door to a false spirituality.

My application? What kind of supernatural are you looking to? Is it a man-centered one that appeals to our flesh, or is it a God-centered one that humbles man’s pride and exalts God’s glory? Is it the demonic supernatural of the New Age, or the Biblical supernatural of Calvinism? The Postmodern world is ripe for takeover by demonic experiences because they are

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<sup>11</sup> Leonard I Sweet, Brian McLaren and Jerry Haselmayer, *A is For Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

unanchored in the Word of God and their worldview is the very opposite of Pauline Calvinism.

## VI. Passionate (“vigorously” – v. 28)

The sixth thing that we see about the Christianity of Apollos was that it was passionate. Verse 28 says that **he vigorously refuted the Jews...** Apollos was serious and passionate about the truth of orthodoxy, and he was utterly intolerant of the Jewish heresies. This kind of passion is anathema to the Emerging Church. Phillip Johnson has written some great critiques. Let me give you just one quote from him. He said,

One thing the participants in the postmodern "conversation" simply will not tolerate, however, is someone who disagrees *and* thinks the point is really serious. Virtually no heresy is ever to be regarded as damnable. The notion that erroneous doctrine can actually be *dangerous* is deemed uncouth and naive. Every bizarre notion gets equal respect. Truth itself is only a matter of personal perspective, you see. *Everything* is ultimately negotiable.

Now, if you want to join the postmodern "conversation," you are expected to acknowledge all this up front—at least tacitly. That's the price of admission to the discussion. Once you're in, you can throw any bizarre idea you want on the table, no matter how outlandish. You can use virtually any tone or language to make your point, no matter how outrageous. But you *must* bear in mind that all disputation at this table is purely for sport. At the end of the day, you mustn't *really* be concerned about the truth or falsehood of any mere propositions.

Some "conversation." The ground rules guarantee that truth itself will be a casualty in every controversy, because regardless of the substance or the outcome of the dialogue, participants have in effect agreed up front that the propositions under debate don't *really* matter.<sup>12</sup>

The passion of a Martin Luther who railed against Rome is unthinkable in their circles. But Apollos was passionate. He was vigorous. He was going for broke in these discussions. Why? Because eternal destinies were at stake; because God's glory was at stake; because truth was at stake. And I think we make a big mistake if we get impatient with theological debate. We are making a big mistake if we take the attitude, “Let's stop fighting and all just get along. I don't want to hear about doctrinal differences.” But truth matters. Let me illustrate it with the doctrine of hell, which these men and women seem to abominate. Even many evangelicals seem to be embarrassed to talk about it. Dr. Sam Storms said,

If there is one undeniable common link between the theological liberalism of the last 150-175 years and contemporary emergent thought, it is the disinclination to discuss (if not an outright denial of the existence of) hell. Many emergent believers, Brian McLaren being chief and most outspoken among them, aren't preoccupied with hell. They dislike the way this biblical reality compels them to

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<sup>12</sup> <http://phillipjohnson.blogspot.com/2005/11/cant-we-all-just-get-along.html>

speak of 'who's in' and 'who's out'. They feel it requires an act of discernment and judgment that only the arrogant and self-assured can make. Let me be brutally honest and forthright: I am unapologetically preoccupied with hell, and for two simple reasons. First, the Bible says it is quite real, and second, the Bible says people are going there. I lie awake at night thinking about 'who's in' and 'who's out'. I'm utterly and unashamedly obsessed with hell because I believe it is real, and because there are people I know and love who persist in their rejection of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and who, apart from repentance and faith in him, will spend eternity there.<sup>13</sup>

Do you have a similar passion for the lost? Are you passionate in your prayer life? Are you passionate about theology? Are you passionate about seeing America reformed and brought back to the Scriptures? Are you passionate about the doctrines of grace? Are you passionate about God's law? It is hard to find this deep passion anymore. It is an embarrassment about the "weirdness" of portions of the Bible that drives many emergent church people, and even Reformed people have picked up some of this lack of passion for the things of God. They are embarrassed by the Old Testament. It's all throughout our culture. Listen to God's attitude toward us when we lose our zeal for Him. Hosea 4:6 says

**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.  
Because you have rejected knowledge,  
I also will reject you from being priest for Me;  
Because you have forgotten the law of your God,  
I also will forget your children.**

It was a disinterest in knowledge that made God uninterested in them. It was a disinterest in God's law that made God want to forget them. Have we lost our passion? What kind of Christianity do you have? The Christianity of Apollos was passionate. Ask God's Spirit for some of that passion.

## **VII. Antithesis ("refuted" – v. 28)**

The seventh thing to distinguish the Christianity of Apollos from that of Post-Modern Christianity is that Apollos had antithesis written all over him. Years ago Francis Schaeffer was warning the evangelical church that they would lose the battle unless they started maintaining antithesis. He was right. We have lost the battle. Let me define antithesis. Antithesis is making a clear distinction between A and non-A; between truth and error. He pointed out that you have not fully defended the truth if you only state what is true. You must also deny the truth of the opposite. This is what Apollos

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<sup>13</sup> Dr. Sam Storms, book review of Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent: By Two Guys Who Should Be*. Found at <http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/why-were-not-emergent-by-two-guys-who-should-be-4/>

did. Verse 28 says, “**he vigorously refuted the Jews...**” He refuted them. That’s not politically correct. Anyway, Francis Schaeffer said, “To the extent that anyone gives up the mentality of antithesis, he has moved over to the other side, even if he still tries to defend orthodoxy or evangelicalism.”<sup>14</sup> That’s where the emergent church is. Some of them are quite willing to affirm some truths, and identify with evangelicalism, but they are unwilling to refute the opposite. They want conversation, not debate. You can affirm all kinds of evangelical things and they are not troubled in the least (even though they don’t believe them). But the moment people start saying that the opposite is wrong, unbiblical, or a damnable heresy and they are irate. If we are to have Reformation in our own day, we need leaders with the same boldness as Apollos; leaders who are willing refute error; leaders who have antithesis written all over them.

This is what I love about the Coalition on Revival documents. These church leaders are calling the church to repentance and to come back to the Word. They are making thousands of affirmations *and denials*. And it is the denials that are the most significant parts of those documents. I love the denials. Those denials keep closet liberals from being able to sign the documents: there’s no wiggle room. It keeps cowardly evangelicals from pretending to be Reformers. But above all, it makes it clear what we believe and what we do not believe. We affirm this, and we deny the opposite. And such clear thinking is absolutely essential. Pray that these documents would make a difference in our society. They have been discussed and refined in America and Latin America. They are now moving to get key leaders to work through this process in other countries. Pray that God would raise up Apolloses, Calvins, Luthers and Knoxes with the courage of the Holy Spirit to confront the idols of our day and to confront the compromised leaders of our day. Nothing less than this will save the church from irrelevance and defeat. May we be a church that is filled with the Spirit, holding to antithesis and willing to lovingly confront the confronters on their own turf.

Mark Driscoll rightly said, “If you do not offend people with the gospel then you offend God.”<sup>15</sup> The emergent church does not have an offensive Gospel. But Paul said that the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (1 Cor. 1:23). He said, “**And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased**” (Gal. 5:11). Antithesis is not an

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<sup>14</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview, Volume One* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1982), p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Driscoll, <http://undergraceinaustin.wordpress.com/2008/03/09/resurgence-text-context-putting-pastors-in-their-place-by-mark-driscoll/>

option. Yet the church in Omaha is very reticent to refute anything. Oh, they'll affirm truth, but they won't refute anything, or distance themselves from anyone. Look at the scandal of who was embraced in the Luis Palau Crusade (liberals and Roman Catholics) and you will see what I mean.

*Phillip Johnson rightly complains,*

What's popular these days—even among professing Christians—is glorying in ambiguity and uncertainty. And then saying, “Can't we all just get along?”<sup>16</sup>

McLaren, Pagit, Jones and other Emerging Church leaders have been asked to take a stand on many issues, but they are not willing to refute anything. When asked about his opinion of homosexuality, McLaren said,

I have my own opinions, but I don't believe that the smartest thing for me to do is to go around and make those varying opinions a reason to separate myself from other Christians... I fellowship with Christians who have a diversity of opinion of this (homosexuality).<sup>17</sup>

Mohler has analyzed the writings of these men and has come to this conclusion:

When it comes to issues such as the exclusivity of the gospel, the identity of Jesus Christ as both fully human and fully divine, the authoritative character of Scripture as written revelation, and the clear teaching of Scripture concerning issues such as homosexuality, this movement simply refuses to answer the questions.<sup>18</sup>

My question to you is this: “How much have you been influenced by the spirit of the Emerging Church?” Can't we all just get along may seem like the “love” of the Bible, but it doesn't even remotely resemble the Christianity of Apollos or for that matter, of Christ and the apostles. We must be willing to refute error or we have compromised our Christianity. Without antithesis, Schaeffer points out that we have given up everything.

## VIII. Creedal (“refuted the Jews publicly” – v. 28)

Eighth, Apollos didn't just refute them privately. Verse 28 says that he “**refuted the Jews publicly...**” Why publicly? Because he wanted the errors of these Jewish leaders exposed for all to see. He didn't want anyone sucked in by their heresy. This automatically set up an institutional standard that was known as the traditions of the apostles. You see, it's not enough to have the Bible. The Bible must be systematically taught. That's what the

<sup>16</sup> <http://phillipjohnson.blogspot.com/2005/11/cant-we-all-just-get-along.html>

<sup>17</sup> As quoted by David Roach in a Baptist Press article found at <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?Id=20420>.

<sup>18</sup> Albert Mohler, “‘A Generous Orthodoxy’ – Is it Orthodox,” at [http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_read.php?cdate=2005-06-20](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2005-06-20)

Westminster Confession of Faith is – it's the systematic teaching of the Scripture given as a Protestant tradition. Now let me explain: the difference between Romanist tradition and Protestant tradition is that Roman tradition adds to the Bible information that isn't there, and Protestant tradition is restricted to the Bible and the Bible alone. The Bible is not against tradition. It is against the traditions of *man*. 1 Corinthians 11:2 says, "**remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.**" His traditions were the systematic doctrines that he taught from the Bible. Apollos was teaching those traditions which he had just learned more perfectly from Aquila and Priscilla. Paul said to the Corinthians, "**that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written** (1 Cor. 4:6). Everything he taught was in the Bible. His traditions were simply the systematization of the Bible. 2 Thessalonians 2:15 says, "**brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught.**" It's not enough to have the Bible. All the denominations that have said, "We have no creed but the Bible," have ended up becoming liberal. The Bible must be systematically taught. 2 Thessalonians 3:6 says, "**But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.**" The apostolic interpretation of the Bible was an institutional thing that separated the church from heretics who left the church. That's the function of creeds.

And the early church fathers claimed that these traditions of the apostles that they were faithfully teaching were not a parallel authority from the Bible (like the later Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox teach). Instead, the church fathers of the first few centuries insisted that they were simply the doctrines of the Bible. They were subordinate standards. In other words, they recognized that the Bible alone is infallible, and that we may not believe any so-called tradition that is not found in the Bible. Now I bring this up to point out that having tradition is Biblical. Another way of saying it is that having a creed or a publicly announced set of doctrines is Biblical. Everyone knew the doctrines of Apollos. The Westminster Confession is a tradition. The issue is not creeds versus non-creeds, but whether our creeds are faithful teachings of Scripture. But the Emergent Church does not want a creed, or at least does not want a creed that is binding or authoritative. They don't want subordinate standards because the *Bible* is not a standard for them. They have thrown off all standards and authority. This is one of the reasons why Mark Driscoll left the Emergent Church. He said,

"The lie that says 'no preaching, no authority and no church discipline' is from the serpent. These are all marks of the current house church and emergent church

movements. We must be aware that much of today's church movement is birthed from the postmodern view of the rejection of authority and truth, thus they reject authority and have no designated leader, they reject objective truth and the community determines truth. The rejection of authority also negates church discipline. The serpent still says, "you can be like God"<sup>19</sup>

In other words, "You can decide for yourself." Where are you at on this issue of a doctrinal divide? Are you willing to have one? Apollos taught apostolic tradition. He was creedal. Some of you have little respect for the creeds because you have thought that it is "just me and my Bible." Well, you have set yourself up as the Creed. We don't demand implicit faith like the Romanists do, but we do believe that the church has faithfully handed down a body of truth that we need to take seriously. Beware of any movement that ditches 2000 years of creeds and doctrines.

## IX. Analytical & Objective ("showing" – v. 28)

The ninth feature of Apollos' Christianity is that it was analytical and objective. It was something that required reasoning and it was something that was objective, not subjective. When I say objective, I mean that the truth is true in all circumstances, all places and to all people. Verse 28 says that Apollos was "**showing from the Scriptures...**" Those Scriptures were 1500 years old, but he was showing from the Scriptures things that needed to be believed. Truth doesn't change. It is objective. Secondly, he was demonstrating, proving or showing something. The fact that the Jews did not believe did not make it non-truth or non-objective. Luke indicates that it was objective even though the Jews may have continued to disbelieve it.

In contrast, modern emergent church people appeal to the fact that there are so many different interpretations out there to prove that there is no objective truth. "That's good for you, and something else is good for this person, and something else is good for me." You could ask them, "Is your statement that there is no objective truth, itself objectively true, or can I ignore it as your unfounded opinion?" But they seem oblivious to the contradiction: they *want* you to believe what they are writing. Tony Jones said, "We must stop looking for some objective Truth that is available when we delve into the text of the Bible."<sup>20</sup> Notice the word "must" – "We must stop looking for some objective Truth..." That's a contradiction. They hate authority, yet constantly act as authorities. As Rushdoony said, infallibility is an inescapable concept. If you ditch the authority of God's Word, you are

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<sup>19</sup> Mark Driscoll, <http://undergraceinaustin.wordpress.com/2008/03/09/resurgence-text-context-putting-pastors-in-their-place-by-mark-driscoll/>

<sup>20</sup> Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. 201

automatically going to substitute something else. Even those who hate infallibility must use it. McLaren said, “In the postmodern world, we become ... postanalytical... postobjective.”<sup>21</sup> What they are trying to say is that we need to have more humility and to stop thinking that we can figure out the Bible. He shows his postmodern thinking by saying that he can't even know what *he* believes (let alone what the Bible believes). He says,

“If I seem to show too little respect for your opinions or thought, be assured I have equal doubts about my own, and I don't mind if you think I am wrong. I'm sure I am wrong about many things, although I'm not sure exactly which things I'm wrong about. I'm even sure I'm wrong about what I think I'm right about in at least some cases. So wherever you think I'm wrong, you could be right.”<sup>22</sup>

While he is trying to portray humility, there is a vast difference between humility concerning our understanding (it's not infallible like the Bible is) and their tendency to ditch objective truth (which is postmodern skepticism). Stanley Grenz (one emergent church spokesman) said, “Can Christian theology make any claim to speak ‘objective truth’ in a context in which various communities offer diverse paradigms each of which is ultimately theological?”<sup>23</sup> His answer is no. This makes for a very welcoming but a very confusing movement. And the wreckage that will come out of this will be devastating. One Emergent Leader, on his web page (with the very revealing name of TheOoze.com), said,

...the various parts of the faith community are like mercury. Try to touch the liquid or constrain it, and the substance will resist. Rather than force people to fall into line, an oozy community tolerates differences and treats people who hold opposing views with great dignity. To me, that's the essence of the emerging church.<sup>24</sup>

And it leads to an “anything goes” theology. Let me read you the title page of Brian McLaren's massively popular book, called *A Generous Orthodoxy*, where he uses the language of Orthodoxy while redefining the meaning. It says, “Why I am a missional + evangelical + post/protestant + liberal/conservative + mystical/poet + biblical + charismatic/contemplative + fundamentalist/Calvinist + Anabaptist/anglican + catholic + green + incarnational + depressed-yet-hopeful + emergent + unfinished Christian.”

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<sup>21</sup> Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2001), p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), pp. 19-20

<sup>23</sup> As quoted by D.A. Carson in *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), p. 130.

<sup>24</sup> Spencer Burke, on www.TheOoze.com.



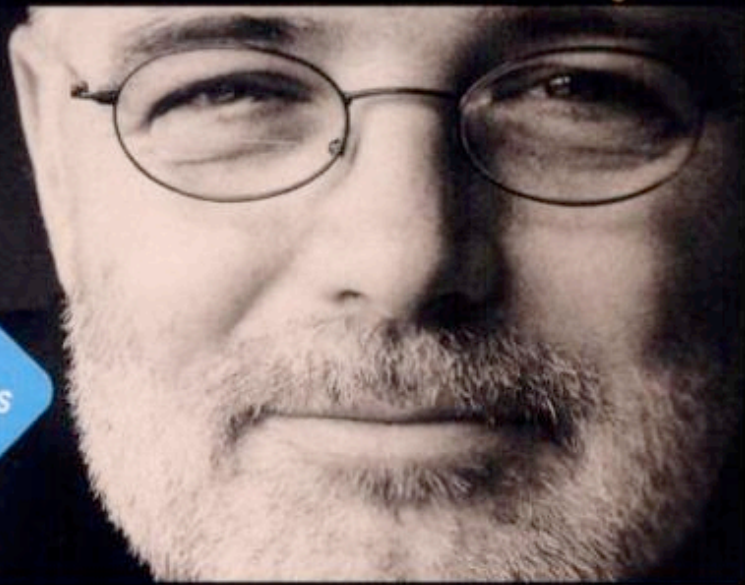
BRIAN D. MCLAREN

# a Generous Orthodoxy

We  
guarantee  
you'll love  
this book, or it's

**FREE**

Peel Here



WHY I AM A missional + evangelical +  
post/protestant + liberal/conservative +  
mystical/poetic + biblical +  
charismatic/contemplative +  
fundamentalist/calvinist + anabaptist/anglican +  
methodist + catholic + green + incarnational +  
depressed-yet-hopeful + emergent +  
unfinished CHRISTIAN

ZONDERVAN

  
emergent  
ys

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Now he does have a lot of humor in his books. He does try to get people to think. But every one of his books are mushy on everything and want everyone else to be mushy as well.

Now let's distinguish this mushiness that never declares anything to be wrong and never bothers to discuss theology with what we are doing in this church. They do have a legitimate gripe about the ungraciousness in fundamentalism, and the lack of humility, contentiousness, backstabbing and lack of love. We too disagree with that. And we too have had to repent of that from time to time. We are seeking to inculcate within our congregation a love that says, "Be patient with him or her. God is not finished with them yet." I believe we are gracious with differing points of view in our church. We don't require people to agree with us on everything to join. In fact, there is very little that you have to agree to in order to start being disciplined. But there is a standard that the church is disciplined to. There is a standard which officers are held to. And there is a standard that guides our public teaching in the church. Thus, though we are Reformed, we have sought to welcome those who don't see Calvinism yet. But we let them know that we are going to be teaching Calvinism, and they shouldn't try to undermine that. Though we are Presbyterian, we have sought to welcome and respect Baptists. But we have never said that all views are equally correct. We allow Baptists to be members, but not officers. And we aren't cynical about truth simply because there are differences of view. We must not allow patience and graciousness to slide over into skepticism and cynicism about the truth as it has in the Emergent Church.

## **X. Authoritative ("from the Scripture" – v. 28)**

And of course we tell our people that we have no authority except the authority of the Bible, and we don't expect anyone to believe what we say unless we can show it from the Scripture. They don't do that. But that's what Apollos did. Verse 28 says, "**showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.**" Paul praised the Bereans for checking out everything that he said from the Bible. This is the primary problem that I have with the Emergent Church – it doesn't submit to the inerrant authority of the Scripture over all of life and in all that it says. The Bible is different from all other literature. It is God's very words to us and it carries all the power and all the authority of God. When the Bible says that homosexuality is a sin and a crime, that should be the end of it for us. We don't question the Bible. Does that mean that we hate homosexuals? No. We love them enough to call them to repentance just as every other sinner is called to repentance. But we allow the Bible to define sin, and we teach God's hatred for and judgment against

all sin. We teach Matthew 1:21 – that Jesus came to save His people from their sins.

In contrast, Brian McLaren says,

“Frankly, many of us don’t *know* what we should think about homosexuality. We’ve heard all sides but *no position has yet won our confidence* so that we can say ‘it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us.’ That alienates us from both the liberals and conservatives who seem to know exactly what we should think.”<sup>25</sup>

But our approach is not to dialogue with all sides and reserve our opinion. It is to ask the Scripture, and submit our opinions to its wisdom. When Jesus said, “**Thy word is truth**,” He was not saying, “Thy word is true.” Saying that the Bible is true is making us the judges of it. But saying, “Your word is truth,” makes the Bible the test of truth claims. It calls our disagreements with the Bible to repentance. Saying, “Thy word is truth” makes the Bible the standard. And in this, the Bible is totally different from all other literature. This is why Brian McLaren errs so greatly when he says,

“As in so many issues these days, the problem isn’t the Bible; it’s the assumptions we bring to the Bible about how it is supposed to be interpreted. We make demands of the Biblical writers that we don’t make of any other writers, and I’m not sure our demands are sensible or fair at all. As an analogy, I often refer to the Wizard of Oz in my teaching. Does this mean that I believe Dorothy was a historical figure? No. It means that I accept the story of Oz as being part of our culture, and that I can use it to illustrate truth or provide analogies to truth.”<sup>26</sup>

I think all of us recognize that as wrong. But if we reject from the Bible the little portions that we think are not convenient, or are not pretty, or are embarrassing, or are not politically correct; or if we think of portions of the Bible as being legalistic, we have started down the same road they have. We haven’t gotten as far, but it is the same principle. But when we point the finger, we need to see if there are any fingers pointing back at us.

## **XI. Historical (“that Jesus” – v. 28)**

And of course, comparing Dorothy (as a non-historical figure) to the figures in the Bible is heresy. Apollos treats Jesus as a real historical figure that no one in his audience could deny. They no doubt wished that they could deny the existence of Jesus, but they could not. They *knew* He was historical. But 2000 years removed from that event, people are still trying to be pastors while questioning the historicity of the Gospels.

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<sup>25</sup> Brian McLaren, “The Homosexual Question: Finding a Pastoral Response,” in *Leadership Journal*, January 23, 2006. To read online, go to [http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/01/brian\\_mclaren\\_o.html](http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/01/brian_mclaren_o.html)

<sup>26</sup> As recorded at <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/301-emerging-church-versus-scripture>

I have in my file a printed sermon preached by Dr. Goff, one of the ministers of St Luke's United Methodist here in Omaha. He's not an emergent. He's an older liberal who denies the deity of Christ, the virgin birth and other truths as being unimportant distinctions and that we shouldn't quarrel or be upset about words. But his language is very similar. The sermon ends by saying this:

What about the questions related to the virgin birth, the Bethlehem Christmas, the miracles, the resurrection, and His coming again...? Isn't it interesting that when we begin to think of how we experience God today [notice that experience is his criteria], rather than as people professed to experience Him in the past [notice the skepticism of anything that others have experienced.], those questions no longer seem so important? The past illogicals become symbols of meaning. The future illogicals become matters of faith that do not require affirmation for hope to reign.<sup>27</sup>

But Paul said that we could have no hope without the truth of history. For example, Romans 15:4 says, **“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”** How important is history to you? Have you bought into the post-modern view that history is bunk? I hope not. Do you teach history and apply history to your children? One of the reasons the church has started the Providential History Festival twice a year is to restore a joy in learning providential history and to teach people how to learn from history. Christianity is rooted in history, and covenant theology connects every generation with history. History is important.

## **XII. Non-Pluralistic (“that Jesus is the Christ” – v. 28)**

The last lesson from Apollos is that his Christianity was not pluralistic. He was **“showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is *the* Christ.”** There are not multiple Christs or multiple ways. He is *the* way, *the* truth and *the* life. Apollos lived and died for Jesus the Christ. He fought and argued for Jesus the Christ. Apart from Jesus he knew there was no salvation. Jesus said, **“Without Me you can do nothing”** (John 15:5). Peter preached, **“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”** Contrast that dogmatic, narrow vision of grace alone and Christ alone with the nice, broad vision of Tony Campolo. (And Ohhh, this sounds so nice to the postmodernists!) He asserted, **“What I think I can say is, and this is where I get into trouble, I'm not so sure that when this life is over that all possibilities for salvation are over.”**<sup>28</sup> In another place he says,

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<sup>27</sup> Sermon by Dr. Goff, March 25, 1990, on file.

<sup>28</sup> As recorded on <http://aaronmartin.blogspot.com/2007/11/scary-words-from-evangelicals.html>

...what can I say to an Islamic brother [How can he call a Muslim a brother?] who has fed the hungry, and clothed the naked? You say, “But he hasn't a personal relationship with Christ.” I would argue with that. And I would say from a Christian perspective, in as much as you did it to the least of these you did it unto Christ. You did have a personal relationship with Christ, you just didn't know it.<sup>29</sup>

Dallas Willard agrees, stating, “It is possible for someone who does not know Jesus to be saved.” Brian McLaren also rejects the meaning of even Christ's statement, “**no one comes to the Father except through me.**” Here's his interpretation:

For too many people the name *Jesus* has become a symbol of exclusion, as if Jesus statement ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me’ actually means, ‘I am in the way of people seeking truth and life. I won't let anyone get to God unless he comes through me.’<sup>30</sup>

But that's exactly what Christ says. Read the Gospel of John – Christ's Gospel is incredibly exclusive and tolerates no rivals. It says that He is the Rock who will crush anyone who rejects Him. Here's what Peter said: **“Therefore to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.’ And ‘A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.’ They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.**

It is precisely this narrow road that the early church walked upon that the emergent church is emerging from and leaving. Yes they are the emergent church because they are quickly leaving the true church. What is scary about this is that many of these men and women came from evangelical and even fundamentalist backgrounds. But their thinking was not shaped by the Bible. I believe it was shaped by the government schools. And it only stands to reason that when we give our children to the pagans to disciple intensively for twelve or more years, that the results will be disastrous. Why are they thinking postmodernly? Because that's all they've ever been taught.

Though we are not emergent, let us beware lest any of these symptoms even remotely afflict us. There but for the grace of God, each one of us would be. Let's glory in Athanasius who fought valiantly for the doctrine of the Trinity and saved the day. Even though the world was against him, he was willing to stand with God's Word against the world. Let's glory in Martin Luther and Calvin who would not budge. Let's glory in the John

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<sup>29</sup> Tony Campolo in an interview by Shane Claiborne, “On Evangelicals and Interfaith Cooperation.” The full interview can be read at <http://www.crosscurrents.org/CompoloSpring2005.htm>

<sup>30</sup> Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 78.

Pipers, D.A. Carsons, Al Mohler's and others who are taking hits today because they are seeking to stand against error. It's a lonely task to be a Reformer like Apollos, and they need our prayers. And for our part, let's make their job easier by being neither enlightenment, premodern, modern, postmodern nor any other kind of thinking that conforms to the world. Instead, let us be Biblicist. Let us be thoroughly grounded in the Scriptures, thinking God's thoughts after Him. Let us have the Christianity of Apollos. Amen.