

The Curse of Liberalism

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August 30,
2019

Two characteristics define liberal epistemology: The subjective becomes authoritative over the Bible and culture drives the church's agenda.

Written by David B. McWilliams | Friday, August 30, 2019

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In 1988, stalwart Baptist leader W. A. Criswell addressed the Southern Baptist Convention on the theme: "The Curse of Liberalism." The curse of liberalism is also what the Presbyterian Church in America now faces. Presently, the virgin birth and bodily resurrection of Jesus are not denied. Nonetheless, the two fundamental characteristics of liberalism are apparent in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). What are the two characteristics that define liberal epistemology? First, the subjective becomes authoritative over the Bible. Second, culture drives the church's agenda.

When TE Greg Johnson spoke at the PCA 2019 General Assembly to rousing applause, both of those liberal, epistemological commitments manifested themselves. The cultural agenda was apparent. And, despite the fact that the Bible is clear about homosexuality, Johnson's emotional autobiographical tale placed his subjective experience over biblical authority.

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The 47th Assembly has appointed a committee on sexual ethics. That is, this committee is commissioned to study matters about which the Bible is abundantly clear and to go over ground that others have thoroughly traversed. Undoubtedly, some members of the

Committee will attempt a compromise. It is also possible that a minority report might surface. In any case, we have been through this before. Study committees produce papers that have no teeth and we go on with business as usual after everyone has had his say.

But, things cannot go on as usual; they must not. Our calling is to promote the purity and peace of the church and in that order. Never is purity expendable for the sake of a worldly peace. In answer to those who wish us to irenicize we respond unequivocally that our calling in this crisis is to polemicize. We love and reverence Jesus Christ and His gospel too much to let the matter drop. We love Christ's church and lost sinners too much to irenicize. Rather, we are called to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Are we more frightened of conflict than we are of error in the church?

The issue before us is clear: we face the deadly flowering of the curse of liberalism in the PCA. If the denomination continues on this trajectory within a few decades we will not be recognizable as a Reformed and Evangelical expression of Christ's church. This is no time for timidity but, rather, for Luther-like boldness. We are battling for the very soul of our denomination. We must call upon our denomination to manifest the marks of the church in her courts.

What must we do? Pray. God alone can bless efforts to turn us from liberalism. Inform church members about our denomination's decline over the years, especially those whose pastors are "progressives" or who give an uncertain sound. Encourage church members to ask their pastors, when there is doubt, where they stand on various issues, such as homosexuals in pulpits of the PCA. Make every effort to call those under the influence of liberalism to faith and repentance and to use appropriate means to encourage discipline if they do not. And, if the Lord is not pleased to bless our witness and efforts to recover the PCA, we must be prepared to leave. At that point the 2 Cor. 6:17 will apply: "Come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."

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