

Dangers of Loveless Orthodoxy & Eclipsing of the Gospel

by Jesse Barrington

James: *What is another concern or fear you might have for this generation of young believers that is coming up?*

Jesse: Another concern that I have for this generation coming up is what I call the eclipsing of the Gospel; the eclipsing of Jesus Christ. Meaning, whether it's the individual or the church finding its identity, its hope, its joy, its fellowship, its unity in something other than Jesus Christ and the Gospel. And it's a very subtle shift that happens without many people noticing that it happens. So often, so many people will come to the church, and they'll begin to discuss with them about they're looking for a church. And so often, brother, there are so many things people are looking for in the church - these byproducts of the Gospel; these byproducts of Jesus Christ, which are good things, but they become the source of their identity, they become the source of their fellowship; they're what they're looking for in a church, and they don't ask questions about Jesus Christ or the Gospel, and that's a great concern.

James: Maybe you could give some examples there. What are things you've seen people looking for too much instead of the essentials of the Gospel?

Jesse: I'll start with this. How about the whole family integration thought? Just this last week, a couple of young people came into the church, seemed like passionate, excited people. And the very first comments and questions were about family integration, family worship.

Brother, our church worships together in that sense. And my home - we practice family worship. But when those things become the mark and identity of a church, or the mark and identity of the believer, and the evidence you can see that this is happening is this is what you talk about most. This is what you're passionate about most. And this is how you base your fellowship, even within the church - those who affirm you in these truths, those who practice in conscience the same things that you do whether it's homeschooling or how you do family worship. And the moment those things become the foundation of our relationship or the identity of the church, and Christ is no longer that foundation, inevitably, it will crumble.

James: What are the biggest dangers confronting the church today? The reformed church specifically?

Jesse: It's kind of getting back to that whole eclipsing of Jesus Christ. And I'm going to preach on this here on Saturday. A great concern I have, especially in reformed circles: all genuine Christians love God, they love truth, they love

doctrine. But in reformed circles, it's like we're known for our doctrine. Those are the doctrinally focused, sound people. We study through Revelation 2 - the letter to the church at Ephesus. And if you've ever read what Jesus commends about that church, they're a doctrinally sound church. They toil in truth. They defend truth. They expose false teachers. They can't stand evil. They can't stand the Nicolaitans and they're commended for all of that, but then Jesus says to them, "But I have this against you, you've left your first love." Now, you might say, well, that was a love for Jesus Christ and I would agree with you. But here's the concern I have: I think our love for Jesus Christ is most manifested for its true sense in our love for His people. In other words, I love Jesus. Well, how do I know I love Jesus? Well, it's evident in the way that I love and treat His people, the church. And what that church was warned about is what we might call loveless orthodoxy.

So the concern I have for the reformed church is that we can have all of our doctrinal positions right; we can debate them left and right, but we lack love - a love for God and a love for His people. And it's a subtle shift again. People will say how can I have all my doctrine right and still struggle? And throughout the Bible, we see examples of churches that have their doctrine right, but they struggle with love towards God and love towards the church. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, if I have all understanding, all knowledge, but I have not love... So the notion is I can have some of these things and be lacking in love. And I think one of the things we need to do in the reformed church is mark loveless orthodoxy as sin that needs to be repented of. It's not something, oh, we should do better in. It's sin to be repented of. The warning Jesus gave to that church is, "Repent and return, or I'll take away your lampstand." It's as serious as it gets. So this eclipsing of Jesus Christ, finding identity in something other than Christ, or believing we're good because we have our doctrine right, but if we lack love, we're nothing. Here's what I struggle with so much in this, James, is that when I preach on this subject - and I've preached on it, I think, probably ten times between men's meetings and the service and different things - ten times in the last year. And I keep getting accused of: well, you just are minimizing doctrine. You're saying that parts of God's Word are not important. And I'm like, listen, I've given my life to the study and preaching and teaching of doctrine. But I've come to realize by God's grace, you can be right in your doctrine and absolutely wrong. And I don't think people realize that. You can have the right doctrine and be nothing. And so what's the mark of maturity? In the reformed circle? Having all your doctrine right. What's the mark of maturity in Scripture? Love. Love.

We begin to look at people as positions, where our conversations are not anymore: "how are you doing, brother?" "What's going on at your workplace?" "How is your marriage going?" It is, "where are you at in this position?" And

brother, they're not people anymore. We're just viewing people as positions to win over to my camp. Be careful. Be careful. One of the sermons I preached on was Romans 14 in this. And I'll mention it some in the sermon, because this is not only, James, in the doctrines that we hold to, but it's also in the living out of our doctrines and convictions. And what I find so interesting about Romans 14 - if you say what does Romans 14 about? Oh, it's about Christian liberty and conscience. No, it's not. It's about living out love in the middle of a church that has differences. And it deals with Christian liberty and conscience, but how do you deal with someone who has a different understanding? You know what I love about Romans 14 more than anything? Is Paul acknowledges: this brother has it wrong. And he doesn't really correct him. His greater concern is this: Are we welcoming one another?

Now think of that. This brother - he says he has a wrong understanding. He is weak in faith, and it's leading him to make decisions that are wrong. And Paul acknowledges it. But he doesn't say: Go over there and correct your brother to the right doctrine. He says: Are you welcoming him? Are you loving him as Christ has welcomed you? And that doesn't mean we're indifferent to doctrine or we don't talk about it. But there's a spirit that if it's not there you can have all the right doctrine in the world and it means nothing. So, Lord, help us, brother.

James: After studying and preaching your recent series on, "Maintaining Unity in the Midst of Diversity," what do you look back on and say most impacted you from your studies?

Jesse: I think the most impactful study that I got from the study there personally was I thought I was a much more loving person. And I realized that the way Paul understands love is that we should not measure our love based on how we get along and respond with those who agree with us, but rather it's with those who disagree or offend us. So if we surround ourselves with people who just affirm us, and who agree on every point of doctrine, hold to all the same convictions, and have the same passions that we do, and we sit around and just affirm each other, you might look at that and say, look how loving we are. And I'm not questioning whether that's genuine love or not. What I'm saying is though the true reality or depth, you could say, of your love for people, is measured in how you respond with those who do not agree; with those who hold to different convictions; with those who have offended you. It is how you respond in those circumstances and those situations that reveals the depth of our love. And I'll go further than that. I think it reveals the depth of our love for Jesus. I think sometimes we can believe, oh, I love Jesus, it's just these immature Christians who don't see it the way I do - they I struggle with. But as I read through Scripture, I think of 1 John 3. How can you love

God whom you have not seen when you can't even love your brother who you do see?

In other words, this: Our love for Christ is always displayed in our love for the church; in our love for others. So our vertical love is always manifested horizontally. Or you could say the depth of it. And again, to take what Paul said then, and the reality of your love horizontally is not with those who agree. It's with those who disagree.

So, I went into that thinking, I'm a pretty loving guy. And I walked away from it realizing, I have so much room to grow in my love as I look how I respond to those who disagree or offend me. Another thing I learned from that is I've watched people when they have disagreements maybe in doctrine or convictions or how they live out their convictions - how they begin to treat other genuine Christians, other believers. And it's almost like they create subgroups or you might say, second-class Christians. And I want to remind us all that there are no second-class Christians. That Jesus Christ identifies with the genuine believer who holds to the lowest view of doctrine; the struggling Christian. He identifies with them. And I'm really struggling in my own life and in the church and the church abroad with the response I'm seeing where people will say things like this: "Yes, we agree in the Gospel and in Jesus Christ, but in this other area of doctrine, we don't see eye-to-eye, and therefore I can't fellowship with you anymore." And that's that eclipsing of Jesus again. Brother, if you agree in Jesus Christ and the Gospel, I'm not minimizing all the other doctrines in the Bible - they're important; they're God's Word - but we have so much in common in Christ and the Gospel, and then you begin to maximize these other areas. I struggle to even use the term, because people get so angry at me. Non-salvific doctrine. But listen, there are other doctrines that you can be wrong in and still be saved.

I think Dr. Mohler did a great job in helping in this. He called it spiritual triage. And he wrote, listen, we don't treat a skinned knee like we do a gunshot wound to the chest. And we have to have a doctrinal triage at some level, so that if you and I can't agree on some level of eschatology, but we see eye-to-eye on Jesus Christ, justified by grace through faith alone, you're my brother. We can be in fellowship. We may not be able to pastor together, but we can be in fellowship, and I need to treat you with the same love that I would treat anybody else. And brother, I'm not seeing that. I'm seeing divisions after divisions after divisions. And it's concerning.

James: And why do you think the devil wants that?

Jesse: Well, when the church is divided, something other than Jesus becomes the basis of our unity. Something other than Jesus becomes the basis of

our fellowship. And the moment that happens and it's not Christ as the foundation anymore, the inevitability is we crumble.