

XV. Contending and Defending the Faith in Biblical Perspective
Contending and Contenders—Defending and Defenders
“America’s Real Religion”

I John 4:1–6

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November 2, 2014, Evening Service

Prayer:

Father, in these moments that we have come to this Your Word, we confess this is the Word of God and now we also desire to know our God from this Word. That means we need Your Holy Spirit. We thank You for Him who has given us new life so that we have eyes to see and ears to hear. We also thank You that the Holy Spirit who gave this Word also works with our minds to renew and transform our minds. We are grateful to You that the Gospel is promised and granted unto us a new heart, a new record and You’re developing in us a new life. You have promised us a new home. Father, help us live for You with that new life so renew our minds to give us clarity. May the meditations of our hearts and the words of my mouth be pleasing in Your sight O Lord, our God for I pray in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Before I read this text in I John I want to make a couple of remarks that are somewhat disclaimers, not to back off from what I would like to unfold for you but to bring it with some amount of clarity and appropriate modifications. First of all, I am not a prophet nor am I the son of a prophet. I want to get that out because what I am going to try and unfold for you is I think already self-evident in our nation but whereby we are to contend and defend the faith. The Bible calls us to deal with the infiltration of Satan by contending for the faith against false teaching and false teachers with in the church. Then the Bible tells us to defend the faith from those assaults that come from the outside with Satan’s strategy of intimidation.

As we have walked our way through this the other week I tried to unfold for you what I believe the real enemy is for us within the church. I believe that theological liberalism is the clearest religious anti-Christian perspective. It uses Christian language and vocabulary but it is absolutely antithetical to Christianity. It is not a subset of Christianity. I am a part of the church of the Reformation that came out of the Roman church but I would have more in common confessionally with the Roman church than I would with theological liberalism because it stands against every salient, foundational doctrine that stands in the Word of God from God is Creator to God is Redeemer to God is Sustainer to His Word being reliable to Jesus Christ being the sufficient singular Savior. All of those things are attacked by theological liberalism.

That is dealing within the church but what about on the outside of the church? What do we face in America? Even though America is declaring itself increasingly secularized meaning it is irreligious and in fact it has never become more religious. Its religion is evangelized aggressively and I would like to try and lay out for you my perspective on America’s real religion. My disclaimer is that I am not a prophet or the son of a prophet. I confess readily that I could and probably should be challenged but I have thought through what I want to lay out for you in this study. The most effective leaders I have ever seen are leaders who know their opponent and know themselves. I want to give to you the religion of what I think is the most prevailing religion that stands before opposing Christianity, America’s real religion.

With all due respect to learning how to share the Gospel with the rising tide of the Islamic faith which I think needs to be done, I believe this religion is even more prevalent than

any movement of the Islamic faith, any movement of Hinduism or Buddhism. I believe this religion actually provides an umbrella for most every religion and every ism except Christianity. This is a dominant religion that I believe is before us and so I'd like to give you some basic handles and then give you what I believe our response should be.

Before we get to what it should be I want to tell you what it can't be. It can't be fear. We are just not allowed that. We are supposed to know Christ, that high treasure of heaven. In Him is the love of Christ that casts out all fear but I do believe it is valid to have concerns. I'm not playing word games any more than Paul did. Paul told us to be anxious for nothing but he had concerns for the church. So there is a place for concern but not fear which paralyzes and silences. So I'd like to get to the concern by laying out what I think we ought to be concerned about and then how we should respond.

So let's start by looking at I John 4 which is a very powerful passage of Scripture that has a broad side of application. I John 4:1 says [1] *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.* John is referring to people who come teaching and leading who are driven by a spirit within them. Their spirit is directing them in some direction. He certainly could be referring also to demonic spirits and for the believer the Holy Spirit but he is primarily looking at what a man or woman does, teach and lead is a matter of their soul, their spirit that is within them. All of life is theological and our spirit has embraced some form of theology in order to direct our lives. So John says not to believe every spirit. Are these teachers and leader's spirit surrendered to God's Holy Spirit? Test their spirit to see if it is of the Lord, their teaching and their leadership. Why? For there are many false prophets that not only have worked their way into the church but false religions and false prophets are out in the world as well.

I John 4:2 says [2] *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.* Is the Spirit of God with the teacher or leader that you're testing who is teaching and leading you? Now John goes to the essential. The One that went to the cross to die for our sins, rose again, ascended and is coming again is Jesus, God saves. He is the Christ, the One who came as Messiah, the Prophet, the Priest and the King who redeems His people. If that teacher or leader is from the Lord, then Christ is preeminent, Jesus is exalted and the incarnation of Jesus is affirmed where the Son of God has come in the flesh to save sinners for the glory of God. Now he goes to the opposite.

I John 4:3 says [3] *and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.* Every spirit that is outside the singular, sufficient, sovereign, saving work of Christ is not from God. You also found out here that there is someone who is called the antichrist who is coming. You also found out something else. There are a lot of antichrists that are here, been here and will be here until the antichrist is here. How do you know that which is against Christ that is already here, not the antichrist but the antichrists, those with spirits that are not from God, the Holy Spirit?

I John 4:4 says [4] *Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.* Those who are not from God do not confess Jesus. They do not confess Jesus as the Son of God having come in the flesh or as they Christ. They do not uphold the singular, sovereign, sufficient, saving work of Christ. They find a way around it and they will not affirm it with what they say. They will always say something that may refer to Jesus but not exalt Jesus as the singular, sovereign, Savior of sinners who comes from God and who is God for the glory of God. That is how you know them.

He then says to you that He wants us to get rid of any fears in our life with this so He addresses us as 'little children' which means my dear little ones. There are two words translated in your Bible as children and this is not the formal one but the one of intimacy. Why have you overcome them? It is not because you are greater than them but it's because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. The Holy Spirit who leads the teachers, leaders from God whom you are testing, is within you. What about them?

I John 4:5 says [5] *They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.* Hold onto that for a moment. Everything I am accurately (God willing) sharing with you of America's now real religion is here and you need to know it's here for two reasons. One it is here because there is a vacuum of salt and light from the people of God, for there is a vacuum of redeeming grace and common grace. Whenever there is a vacuum of redeeming grace to reach into the world for Christ and has the overflow of common grace where even though people don't get converted it restrains them from sin in society, it is there because of us. What breaks my heart is what I see happening, is happening on my watch as a pastor in his church in a place that has known the exceptional blessings of God with two significant Gospel Awakenings. We are in a desperate need for another one and one of the reasons is because of the vacuum we have created because the church of Jesus Christ is not giving the River of Life of redeeming grace and the work of common grace to restrain sin in society. Whenever that vacuum is there the default in the world will always be against Christ.

They are in the world. Don't be amazed that the message of the world will take their heart for it is inevitable. We should not be shocked when the world starts believing the message of the world and becomes of the world. We ought to know that unless redeeming grace to change people and common grace to restrain people comes then the world will always do this and we are the ones responsible to bring redeeming grace and common grace. So they are in the world, speak from the world and that should not amaze us when that happens. When the religions of this world take hold of the hearts of men, that should not amaze us.

I John 4:6 says [6] *We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.* The Holy Spirit gives us a desire to hear the Word (wisdom) of God instead of the word (wisdom) from the world. Recently we heard a wonderful testimony from a father about the saving work of grace in the life of his son. He said that his son came and talked to him and then he began to talk with his son about the Gospel. Then he said that it wasn't the first time that he had ever talked to his son about the Gospel but he thought it was the first time he ever heard it.

Here is what I like to tell preachers. Do you know that wonderful moment when someone joins the church and they come up and say 'Oh preacher you're such a great preacher and that's why I'm here and I never heard the Gospel until I came to this church and heard you preach'? I tell pastors not to get a real big head about that because the kids that you are preaching that to are probably going to say that to some other preacher out there. Now in some cases they were raised in a theological liberalism and they haven't actually heard the Gospel but it was exactly what this father said in his testimony about his son. The Gospel had been preached they just hadn't heard it. Then the Holy Spirit comes and they get eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart to receive.

So the Holy Spirit who is greater than the spirit in the world is in you and He gives you not only the ability to love the truth but the ability to discern and test so that you know what error is and what truth is. If it is true then it will line up with God's Word and what it reveals about the sovereign, sufficient, singular Savior Jesus. God's Spirit will bear witness through His Word

of the exaltation of Christ. If it is not, then we are not to listen to it. That doesn't mean we don't try and win those who are teaching it. Remember we're to win the day and win the person. We have been studying that.

Now what is the shape of the world religion that is really at work in America? In the United States in general we are told particular among millennials that the number one response in this day is not Protestant, Roman Catholic, or mainline Protestant but it is none. I don't have a religion and here we are in the buckle of the Bible belt. Recently in the survey from the public religion research institute it said that in Alabama white evangelical Protestants were 36 percent, black Protestants were 18 percent, unaffiliated were 14 percent, white mainline Protestants were 13 percent and goes on to list all the various cults etc. There are more unaffiliated than mainline Protestants. When I start talking with my colleagues in the ministry and we start getting drawn to marginalizing and modernizing the message I just tell them look at the mainline Protestants. How is that working for them? If you're going to be in culture you have to speak the language of the culture but you also have to be counter-culture with a distinct message that creates a distinct life that is marked by grace and truth.

So what is that 'none' group believing? Someone recently told me that it means that Americans are increasingly not religious. You know that's not true because you recently heard me preach on Acts 17 in which I gave you the Apostle Paul's seven observations about the people that you contend and defend. The number one observation is that everyone is a believer. Number two is that everyone is religious. Number three is everyone is worshipping according to their religion which is directed by what and who they believe. Number four is it isn't working and that's why they are always looking for something new at Mars Hill. That's why they had an idol to an unknown god. Number five is that you have the answer. Number six is that without the Holy Spirit enabling you, you won't share it and seven without the Holy Spirit they won't receive it. That's what we now so I don't believe America is irreligious.

I believe America is very religious. I believe there is a dominant religion. I believe it directs a dominant faith commitment in a world and life view. There is a world and life view that you have. It is developing a religion, a life style according to your life view and its calling for your affection, adoration and commitment. You have your own every member commitment in this religion. Your time, treasure and talents are available to it. It also has a savior and a confession. What would that possibly be?

Here is the first thing I would say to you about it. America's real religion I believe can be properly identified as secular narcissistic humanism. We in the public square and in the marketplace of life are committed now a new religion and the new religion is to remove religions specifically, most pointedly Christianity. Here is the way it starts off. In our country you are free to worship in this place at that time under your non-profit status but you can't take it out of there here for this is the secular. It is to be cleansed of what you call the sacred. You can't bring the sacred into the secular. If I hear one more politician who claims to be a Christian and then says to someone that their religion will not affect the govern and lead, then you haven't got Christianity.

Christianity affects everything in your life. The Christian says 'no' to the sacred, secular dichotomy. We don't believe in a sacred secular. We believe a sacred and the sacred that is our dynamics of our grace delivered relationship with Christ leads us into every arena and sphere of life. It directs me as a husband, father, pastor, and when I delivered packages for UPS, sold insurance, loaded trucks, pumped gas, cleaned the bathrooms and when I was a security guard. It is to direct every piece of my life. There is no sacred secular for us.

So they start off saying there is the secular and there is the sacred but we have gone beyond that. There is the secular and at the moment we're going to give you a little space over here for the sacred and as long as you keep it there we will tolerate you. If you bring it out of there, there will be a subpoena for your sermons or the threats of intimidation of financial, cultural, academic penalty and soft persecution. So there is the secular movement that the public square is to be sanitized from the sacred in general and Christianity in particular.

Why are they so bent on Christianity? It is because Christianity is the one statement of a relationship with God that is all consuming and all demanding from us and they know it. That is what is so interesting about Islam. They get it. If it's a religion and it's true then it ought to mean everything. Please be careful of this. The response that is taking place to the movement of radical Islam is that we must get rid of extremists in religion. The problem is that they are extremists. That is not the problem for I am an extremist. The problem is what they extremely believe and do. What is extremism? It's everything but that is Jesus for me. He is everything to me. The point is not the extremity of their commitment but the point is what they are committed to and how they propagate it. That's the problem. For us there is no sacred secular and there is no place we can vacuum out of our life that Jesus takes us into every arena of life that we might take Him into every arena of life.

Notice that I have said secular, narcissistic humanism. I am a humanist. I believe we are to be concerned about human being. I want to be a humanitarian but I do not want to embrace humanism where man is the measure of everything and that man is all and in all. It is a man-centered view of life and that got Peter into trouble on the road to Caesarea Philippi when he responded to Jesus' statement that He would go to Jerusalem, die and be raised on the third day saying "God forbid that should happen to You." Jesus said to Peter "Get behind Me Satan" for Peter had become the personification of Satan. How did he get that way? Jesus says in the next statement "You have set your mind on man's interests and not upon God's." The best thing for man is to think not man-centered but God-centered. So humanism today has become man-centered, man-reliant, man-sufficient and man determines what is truth.

Now I have added a phrase in front of that. It is secular narcissistic humanism because it's not just secular humanism but it's narcissistic humanism. It's not just man-centered but it's me-centered. It's not just man-reliant but it's self-reliant. It is self-reliant, self-absorption and self-exaltation where it's all about me and that's why we shut people's voices down in the public square by saying 'you've offended me.' All of life revolves around me so if you say something that offends me it's not allowed.

I have this mischievous streak and one time as we were talking about sexual ethics and a man said to me "What you just said just offended me" and I said "that's interesting because what you just said just offended me but really whether I've offended you or you've offended me and if I have offended you appropriately I will need to ask for your forgiveness but the real point is have we offended God when we determine sexuality and how it is to be used?" I have great news for you for this God whom we have offended has made a way for us to be right with Him and that's what is absolutely astounding but the narcissistic view of life is that it not only becomes self-centered into humanism but it's me-centered and me-reliable and I determine my own truth. We have coded this into our language.

We have even done it in the church, haven't we? We will say things like this in Sunday school; 'God said it, I believe it and that settles it.' That is still man-centered. It ought to be 'God said it and that settles, now do you believe it?' We do not declare truth. We do not reveal

truth. We are called to embrace truth, understand truth and live truth. God is the giver of truth. So we have this secular narcissistic humanism.

I went and found the declaration of self-esteem. First let me give you the hymn of this secular narcissistic humanism. It is the song "I Did It My Way." It is the number one chosen song for funerals in America today and that shouldn't surprise you. The declaration of self-esteem is all over the internet. It is I am me and in all the world there is no one exactly like me, there are persons who have some parts like me but no one adds up exactly like me therefore everything that comes out of me is authentically mine because I alone choose. It's amazing how we can take good solid truth and then pervert it by becoming man-centered. You are unique and there is nobody quite like you but it's not because of you and what you chose but it's because of Him. Lord, I am fearfully and wonderfully made for You knit me in my mother's womb (Psalm 139:13-14).

The self-esteem declaration goes on to say that I own everything about me. I own my body including everything it does, my mind including all its thoughts and ideas, my eyes including the images of all they behold, my feelings whatever they maybe – anger, joy, frustration, love, excitement – my mouth and all the words that come out of it polite, sweet, rough, incorrect or correct, my voice loud or soft and all my actions whether they be to others or to myself. Again, you take a valid truth which is personal responsibility and then you turn it into personal absorption.

The third part of the self-esteem declaration says I own my fantasies, my dreams, my hopes and my fears. I own all my triumphs and successes, my failures and mistakes because I own all of me and I can become intimately acquainted with me. Your Bible says 'who alone knows the heart of a man but the Lord.' Only the Lord knows you. You know you better than I know you and I know me better than you know me but I don't know me. The Lord knows me. He knows me from my lying down to my standing up but the declaration of self-esteem continues.

I can then make it possible for all of me to work in my best interest in life. So I know there are aspects about myself that puzzle me and other aspects I do not know. So long as I am friendly and loving to myself I can courageously and hopefully look for the solutions to the puzzles and for ways to find out more about me. However I look and sound, whatever I say and do and whatever I think and feel at any given moment of time is me. This is authentic and it represents where I am at that moment in time. Now when I review things later, how I look and sounded, what I said and did and how I thought and felt, some parts may turn out to be unfitting. I can discard that which is unfitting if I desire and keep that which has proved fitting and invent something new for that which I have discarded. I can see, feel, think, hear, say and do. I have the tools to survive – to be close to others, to be productive, to make sense in order of the world, people and things outside of me because I own me. Therefore I can engineer me because I am me and I am okay.

I think that works right within our churches. I hear people doing this and being well meaning in counselling. You have to learn to forgive yourself. You don't forgive yourself for you receive the forgiveness of the Lord and you believe it. You may forgive yourself when you can atone for your sins but if you can't atone for your sins you can't forgive yourself. If you could atone for your sins then the Lord would have never sent His Son to die for you. More precisely I need to receive and believe the forgiveness and acceptance that I have Jesus and what He has done for me. My forgiveness doesn't start with me and it's not all about me but it redeems me because of what Jesus has done for me.

The third thing is that this has led to a new pluralism. The old pluralism in our nation was that because of what Christianity has done in our nation, instead of this new religion of secular narcissistic humanism, everyone had a right to believe what they want to. It now is that whatever you believe is right and that's the new pluralism. That accommodates relativism which says there is no truth. There have been so many times I've been in a debate and they say "You're saying Jesus is the only way and you're saying that is an absolute truth." I would respond "Absolutely for He is the way, the truth and the light and no man comes to the Father but through Jesus and I didn't invent it but I'm just reporting it." They would say "There is no absolute truth." And my response is "Oh really, is that an absolute truth that there is no absolute truth? By the way, I gave you the One that gave me mine where Jesus is the truth and He gave that to me in His Word, now who gave you yours?" Again, it's man's inventions and the wisdom of the world.

Four, our first liberty in this nation with our new religion is being redefined and replaced. Our first liberty used to be freedom of speech and freedom of religion. That is now being redefined and rapidly replaced by another new first liberty of secular narcissistic humanism. Our first liberty of freedom of speech and freedom of religion is now being redefined as freedom to worship. The Soviet Union had freedom to worship but we had something really different called freedom of religion. That freedom of religion was the freedom to practice the religion that you were committed to. The State did not prescribe your religion. That was between you and the Lord and the church that you were a part of but you had freedom of religion unless it violated our covenant law called the Constitution, otherwise there was absolute freedom of religion unless it took away someone's life, liberty or pursuit (not guarantee) of happiness. That is now being redefined as freedom of worship.

I have heard politicians say it numerous times and I don't think it's any accident that they are all saying it. If I can say freedom of worship then I can take Christianity and put it in that building at that hour on that day in that place but it can't come out here in our secular narcissistic humanist society. It can't come out there because it is a violation of it. Right now we have redefined and we're going to put it there but it won't be long when that will be gone as well. It will be gone because of the new liberty.

I have tried to word this carefully. The new first liberty of American secular narcissistic humanism is the unfettered practice of sexual eroticism to the pursuit of sexual anarchy. That is the new liberty and nothing can stand in its way. That is the tsunami that is rapidly engulfing this nation. It is replacing freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Right now it's redefining it but soon it will replace it. A moral evolution is what our President called it which in reality is an immoral devolution in which the abnormal is declared as normal. It is where sexual eroticism becomes sexual anarchy and social approval. At the moment it was that we needed a society that tolerates sexual eroticism and therefore if you're not tolerant of sexual eroticism then you will not be tolerated. Really and truly this tsunami of immorality of this unfettered pursuit of sexual eroticism leading to sexual anarchy will not stop with Christianity tolerating it for they will insist upon our affirmation, our celebration and our participation and when those of us who won't don't, then will be the persecution. That is where the first liberty is moving, the new one that has been stated.

Every religion needs a savior and who is the savior in this religion? It is the messianic State. The State has become the redeemer, the sustainer and the provider. The State is now what we look to, to redeem us, to save us, to sustain us, and to provide for us. We have a new priesthood and it is the unquestioning of the scientists and the decrees of the politicians. The

State will take you if they allow you to live from the womb to the tomb. They have absolute authority and gaining authority as to whether you live in the womb or you get an early tomb but from the womb to the tomb the State is now the family and the new church because it is the redeemer, sustainer and provider. That's why it will continue to multiply litigation and regulation in order to do what it has promised which is to save you, redeem you and sustain you.

The problem is not that the messianic State is failing for you will be told at every election the problem is that the messianic State is not big enough and pervasive enough so it needs to be bigger. It needs more of you and more of your every member commitment to it and it controls with regulation and litigation. So now, our new national motto is becoming 'In the State we trust' and not 'In God we trust.' I now this deserves much more treatment but I thought I would get this out to start with.

I'd like to close with this. This past Friday night when it was about 45 degrees outside I stood with about 50 men right in front of where Abraham Lincoln gave the Gettysburg Address on the battlefield at Gettysburg at the National Cemetery. I had the privilege to share with them God's work of grace in Abraham Lincoln's life and document at his conversion which I think took place between 1862 and 1863, how its revealed in his Meditations on the Divine Will written in 1862, the Gettysburg Address in 1863 and in his Second Inaugural Address which I think is the greatest presidential Inaugural address that's ever been given. I had the privilege to tell them how his conversion was given by Peter Marshall at New York Presbyterian Church which is where Lincoln went to church and under the guidance of Phineas Gurley was brought to Christ and discipled particularly toward how to properly implement the Emancipation Proclamation.

I told them about the couch where Lincoln sat on Wednesday nights and on Sunday nights so that he didn't cause any consternation. That sermon was delivered in 1954 that documented it and when he finished documenting it a senator and a congressman were sitting out there on a Sunday night. There's a miracle right there that a senator and a congressman were at a Sunday night service. They heard it and were so moved that they went back and introduced to laws. Law number one was they took the phrase he put in the Gettysburg Address that said 'under God' and put it in the statist humanist creed that had been adopted in America called the Pledge of Allegiance. The reason people pause when they get to that phrase is because it was put in years after it had already been started to honor Lincoln and the Gettysburg Address.

The also heard in his testimony how he had been drawn to desire that the motto of this country would be the one that George Washington wanted but never got passed and that was 'In God we trust.' So they went back and passed the law that the motto of this country officially would be 'In God we trust' and therefore it was put on the currency. It was done to put on the currency lest we trust in money but I believe the problem is we are putting our trust in government. There is a place for government. Governments make good governments but they are terrible gods. They will consume you. They will destroy you if you see them as your savior, redeemer and sustainer.

So what should we do? Let's go get redeeming grace back into the world. Let's go evangelize and disciple. Let's speak to public policy for common grace's sake. Let's speak thoughtfully, courageously, compassionately and clearly. Let's go with those small group discipleships and that evangelism. Let's find ways to share the Gospel in personal evangelism to others. Let's get on our knees and pray that God would intervene in a glorious way. There are prayer meetings happening all over this church for this. Let's pray and call upon the Lord to do a great thing. Let's not fear, be concerned but not fear for you have a Kingdom that cannot be

shaken and that Kingdom has a Gospel that transforms lives and shakes nations. While I am grieved by where we are as a nation, it is where we are in those moments that God has done His most glorious work and He has done it before and may He yet do it again for His own glory.

I want you to be a profane church. I thought I would get your attention to close with prayer but I'm just quoting Martin Luther. The word profane means 'out from the sacred' and Martin Luther meant not that you leave the sacred but that you take the sacred in the world. Your Savior wasn't meant to stay in this building but to go to this world and be exalted. You are the exalter of the Savior and not ourselves. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together and for the grace and truth that comes in Christ and from Christ that we might exalt Christ. God, I pray that You would help us to be thoughtful in these matters and that You would help us realize the spirit of the age as Paul says to the Corinthians. Help us deal with Your opponents in the way You have dealt with us – with compassion, courage, clarity and with the Gospel of saving grace in Christ. Father, may we again from this pulpit, from these pews, in our small groups and when we disassemble going into the world, be a river that sends the glorious message of redeeming grace and the benefits of common grace into this nation and from this nation to all the nations for I pray in Jesus, who has called us to make disciples of the nations, Amen.