

Avoiding Religiopolitical Deception

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Certainty: Absolute Truths that Produce Joyful Assurance

Assurance; Confidence; Honesty and Dishonesty

1 John 3:4–10

Religiopolitical is a word that combines religious and political deception. The problem with this kind of deception is that it is difficult to catch. For Pluckrose and Lindsay, the answer to Critical Theory is *Secularism - separation of church and state* (*Cynical Theories*, 263). For Fea, voting for Donald Trump was considered the lesser of two evils for many evangelicals (*Believe Me*, 195). For some Independent Baptists, the preachers led services where they equated God and Country. In each of these cases, there is a particular view of Jesus that is both inconsistent with the scripture and insufficient.

As I thought of it, there are four positions that often characterize people. There may be more, but here are four. These are broad strokes to give quick definitions:

- **Fideist** - some people base belief on their emotional experience without sound logic or truth.
- **Traditionalist** - some people base belief on their experience or religious traditions taught by men.
- **Theorist** - some people base their experience on a worldview that begins with some kind of identity: gender, racial, or economic class.
- **Rationalist** - some people base belief on an intellectual grasp of God, Christ, the Bible before they will believe.

These positions too are deceptive because of their assumptions about Jesus Christ — his sufficiency and completeness. When the way we determine right/wrong, good/bad, or saved/unsaved begins with something other than the faithful, redemptive, scriptural exposition of Christ's evident purpose and work in history, we are left with volatility, instability, uncertainty and joylessness. **But when the foundation of our experience is the clear, scriptural, redemptive exposition of Christ's historical purpose and work, we can have confidence and joyful assurance. Let no one deceive you!**

(1) Use God's dictionary over Wikipedia (v. 4)

There is a service that is often used by today's generation(s) called Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia that offers a wealth of information — some true and some false. It is information at our fingertips. Among all of this information, you can find definitions. Definitions are important, but we must not allow Wikipedia or our culture to define something as serious as sin. The scripture gives this to us here:

1 John 3:4 KJV 1900

⁴ Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

Before John gives the command to not allow anyone to deceive them, he establishes what is truth by **defining sin as lawlessness**. This definition confirms that there is no sinless perfection regardless of what the false teachers are saying, but it does something else that may be helpful for us today: *This exhortation establishes terms or boundaries*. We do not get the right to add to the definition of sin or to take away from the definition of sin. Often, the *traditionalist* will make things out to be sin which are NOT sin. On the other hand, carelessness about sin is not right morally either.

Recently, a prominent ministry in California held a Camp Meeting. There were sermons preached by notable pastors and evangelists from within the Baptist denomination. As you listen to applications they made from parts of the scriptures that they preached, they were often directly and indirectly adding to the scriptural definition of sin. Words like *compromise* and *worldly* were used to gloss over well-reasoned and defined positions.

Christians, we should make sure that our applications are just as much in context as our interpretations of the Bible. **Let God's word define sin for you, as opposed to our culture or even other "Christians."** Are you careless about sin? Are you careful not to make something sin that is not sin?

(2) Think clearly about Jesus and his work before throwing a tantrum (v. 5-6)

Throwing a tantrum is often associated with a toddler who does not get what he or she wants. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for adults — especially

adults who have believed something for most of their lives without being taught how to think well through their beliefs.

1 John 3:5-6 KJV 1900

⁵ And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. ⁶ Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

John gives these two verses, and he has a flow of logic that is set forth. In short, this is similar to an “If...then...” statement, which is a conditional statement modeled as follows: “If claim #1 is true, then claim #2 must be true....” But what John does is he gives two truths: IF...(i) Jesus was manifested to take away our sins AND (ii) Jesus was manifested as sinless, **THEN those in Jesus do not continue in the practice of sin.** It is a statement which gives a logical conclusion. John wants his readers to think clearly and let emotion follow rather than allow emotion to lead them thoughtlessly.

Of the four types of people I mentioned at the beginning, three of them need to see and hear this:

- *the Fideist who errs towards faith without reason.*
- *the Theorist who is led by his/her own experience rather than objective reason.*
- *the Traditionalist who has been taught many preferences without sound reason.*

Of the ones that I am calling *Traditionalist*, listen to what John Fea says:

I was unprepared for the level of anti-intellectualism I would encounter among many Trump evangelicals...my engagement with Trump-supporting evangelicals made me realize that few of the president’s supporters are open to engaging with rational arguments rooted in American history and political philosophy. (197)

Emotions, especially when they are tied to relationships, can lead us down a path of deception. **The remedy is to begin with God’s clear, well-ordered truth.** Are you a Christian who has believed what you have been told without thinking clearly through the logic of scripture?

(3) Recognize the mountain so that you know the mole hill (v. 7-8)

Maybe you are not familiar with the phrase, “Don’t make a mountain out of a mole hill.” This phrase is a figure of speech to tell someone not to make something a bigger deal than it is. Another phrase like this is, “Don’t cry over spilled milk.” In order to avoid deception, we have to be clear about which is the “big deal,” and which is not the “big deal.” For some people, everything seems to be a big deal. For others, we listen to news outlets, and we allow them to make us believe that everything is a big deal.

1 John 3:7-8 KJV 1900

⁷ Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. ⁸ He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

These two verses (7-8) give a contrast which is set off by the phrases “...*he that doeth righteousness...*” and “*He that committeth sin...*” What John does is draw attention to the **cosmic purpose of Jesus Christ**. John paints a really clear picture of what the mountain is.

Understanding this should do two things for Christians and one thing for non-Christians:

- (i) Christian, all loss, suffering, difficulty or trials must be understood within God’s greater, providential purposes. We can find assurance in the fact that God has come to destroy sin and will come to complete what He has begun.
- (ii) Christian, understanding Christ’s purpose gives confidence for our mission. There are people living under the blindness of the devil, and the only truth that can destroy this is the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Preach the gospel to someone who is lost in sin!
- (iii) Soul who is still in unbelief, there is only one cosmic champion who has come, and you are either with him or against him. Repent of your sin and receive Jesus as your Lord today!

The mountain of Christ's work should keep all other things within this life in perspective.

(4) Believe that the life of the snake-crusher within you is more powerful than sin (v. 9)

The “snake-crusher” is a phrase used by Kevin DeYoung in his book *The Biggest Story*. It comes from the promise of Genesis 3:15 where God promises to send someone through the *seed* of the woman to crush the head of the serpent. While I John 3:9 may be difficult to understand, there is a thematic connection that I want you see:

1 John 3:9 KJV 1900

⁹ Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

What exactly is John saying? While there are several ways to interpret this passage, John seems to be saying that:

- (i) Saved people have God's divine life/nature inside of them
- (ii) This new divine life cannot sin, though it is among a sinful nature

There are several reasons why I hold this interpretation, but we do not have time to elaborate them all here. **This serves the main point of his passage, that those who are truly in relationship with God cannot continue in sin because they have a divine nature within them.**

Maybe you read the following story¹:

A baby girl is being treated at LeBonheur Children's Hospital after being attacked by a pet raccoon at a Cross County, Arkansas home Sunday.

The child's mother, Selena Creel, and another woman, Amber Reed, are both facing charges of child endangerment and possession of drug paraphernalia.

¹ <https://wreg.com/news/two-charged-after-pet-raccoon-attacks-baby/> (Accessed: March 21, 2021).

Cross County Sheriff David West said the women had been drinking alcohol and using drugs and apparently were not aware the pet raccoon had gotten into the baby's playpen during the night.

Sheriff West says the child, who is eight to ten months old, was bitten several times on her arms and legs.

There is no word on how the baby girl is doing. The sheriff says the DHS has been notified about the incident.

What happened is what one would expect. A raccoon did what a raccoon is made to do. Though this is a negative example, it can serve positively as well. **Non-Christians do what non-Christians do — live in sin. On the flip side, Christians are new creatures who will increasingly live with power over sin.**

(i) Christians do have the power to overcome sin.

In like manner, a child of God matures and becomes increasingly like the Son of God. This is tremendously helpful for the Christian who is wondering if they have the power to overcome sin in their life. The answer is, "Yes." This power is not your own power, but it is the power of God within you.

(ii) Christian experience comes after doctrinal truth.

This point is difficult for the *Rationalist* who wants everything to make sense before he or she believes. You must believe the well-ordered truth of Jesus, but you cannot expect that your finite mind will understand everything.

The Christian life is not purely intellectual. There is an experience that is founded upon truth. Christians should be experiencing regular victory over sin. Avoiding deception requires, not ultimate confidence in my reason but rather confidence in God's seminal and continuing work in me.

(5) Know that closet Christians only exist where we believe in a closet Christ (v. 10)

"Closet" is a term that is often used figuratively today. It speaks of someone who is looking to reveal something about themselves that may be difficult for

people around them to accept. Notice the language of John in this verse:

1 John 3:10 KJV 1900

¹⁰ In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

John connects the word *manifest* here with how he has spoken about the manifestation of Jesus:

1 John 3:5 KJV 1900

⁵ And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

This was a problem for the false teachers, but John makes a point that **just as Jesus was manifested, so too will his followers be manifested**. This time though John's evidence of a follower of Jesus Christ is not abstaining from sin, but it is proactive about righteousness.

Don't be deceived:

(i) True Christians are not only those who don't sin, but they are also those who live out righteousness.

(ii) True Christians are not those who wait back for someone to be loving to them, but they proactively love their brethren.

- › ONLY the clear, scriptural, redemptive exposition of Christ's historical purpose and work can give us confidence and joyful assurance.

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