

Fighting for Truth in a Postmodern Age

(1) A Warning for College and High School Students

Parents and young people, we are engaged in a fierce battle. I am not talking about the battle against drunkenness, laziness, or the movies and music of this world, or even about the church's fight against false doctrine, although we war against those things. The enemy we face lurks in the colleges and universities, the news networks, radio programs, movies, and in certain churches. It dresses up in many different kinds of clothes, so you may not have noticed even if it slipped into your house through the back door.

Satan has been lying for six thousand years. The armor of the church shows the wear and tear of heavy and toilsome battle against numerous lies throughout history: the heresy of Arminius, the deception of evolutionism, the ungodly philosophies of the Enlightenment period, and on and on. Now, one of Satan's lies is found in what is called postmodernism. As indicated by the word itself, postmodernism comes after the modern period. The modern period was largely brought on by the Enlightenment, and extended roughly to the early to mid-1900s. The modern period concerned itself with being able to come to definite conclusions. In that sense, truth was knowable, and certain conclusions could be made about reality. Then, increasingly more and more, postmodern thought crept onto the scene. While the roots of postmodernism cannot be exactly located, much of its beginning, especially in America, sprouted out of the tumultuous 1960s. During this time, and up until our day, facts and realities of this world have been questioned. What does it mean to live in a postmodern age? It means that people—specifically what people we will get to in these articles—question the ability to come to any conclusions about reality; it questions whether truth is actually knowable; it means asking many questions without having many answers. In this first article, we consider the postmodern threat in universities.

“So,” you might ask, “why does this concern me as a parent or as a student in high school or college”? I am compelled to write this article because, just having finished university, I realize more than ever the threat that postmodernism poses in post-secondary education. Still, you ask, “so what”? This is why the matter is so serious: postmodernism, which attacks truth and the ability to know it, attempts to destroy our worldview which has for its very foundation the truth of God's Word.

Although postmodernism is a somewhat vague, mysterious force in the universities and colleges, we must not shy away from seeking to identify it so that we can know

what we fight against. Let us identify some symptoms. If you are in college, or anywhere else for that matter, have you ever heard someone say, “I feel that...,” instead of “I know that...,” even on relatively clear issues? If you attend a Christian college, has your theology or religion professor questioned basic truths of Scripture, basing what he says upon the changing winds of popular opinion in the church world? If you attend a college or university, have you ever sensed the overwhelming acceptance of all kinds of ideas, behaviors, and opinions? If so - and the symptoms are certainly not limited to these—your school may be suffering from a violent bout of postmodernism.

I do not believe we live in a day yet in which professors try to stuff their agendas down students’ throats. In our day of tolerance and political correctness (cousins, or perhaps daughters of postmodernism), I do not believe the classroom is a very intimidating atmosphere, even for Christians. If you talk about your Christian faith, a response you might receive from your professor is, “That is great you have such strong faith and commitment”! The problem is, the professor, whether forced by the university or not, must say the same thing to atheists, Buddhists, New Agers, homosexuals, and Muslims. Now, this may not be every student’s experience. Maybe you have had a professor that has ridiculed you for your Christian faith. But by and large, in our day of tolerance, Christian students are still somewhat protected and able to voice their faith.

But the warm, inviting atmosphere and free acceptance of ideas in the college classroom is exactly what is so concerning. Tolerance born of the notion that truth is not really attainable is precisely why post-secondary education can be so dangerous. Worldviews are fanned out like a deck of cards. The “card-dealing” professor might acknowledge your truth, the Bible, but he also says, “consider all these other truths. You must not limit yourself. What, after all, is truth”? One author put it this way: “...in our daily experience we are in constant contact, at least at the level of knowledge, with other worldviews, lifestyles, and beliefs, and they tend to negate each other. They rub the corners off each other and make it seem highly unlikely that any one view is uniquely true.”^[1] It can be that a Reformed believer attends college, comes into contact with a great number of other belief systems and philosophies, and the result is that the waves of postmodernism gently but steadily lift his anchor from its foundation in truth. Before long, his boat is adrift at sea, facing the terrifying waves and storms of countless worldly ideas. To this student, that which he has been taught his whole life in the home, church, and school is not so unique anymore, and it is hardly believable when placed side by side with all the other worldviews. Perhaps you have seen someone close to you change drastically after college. He or she is much more critical of the truth of God’s Word, and even completely unable to define or

identify truth. That is a sad case, and it can be reality. This student tolerates, if not even completely accepts, these other worldviews and ways of thinking.

I do not want to leave the impression that we should not learn about other worldviews in college. Many of our teachers would recommend that students receive a rigorous liberal arts education. It indeed has benefits in that it teaches young people and young adults about the workings of God throughout history, and how He works in the world of science, philosophy, language, music, and so on. College turns out critical thinkers, better writers, and life-long learners.

But the point still stands. Young people, are you ready for college? An important question! Parents, are your children, especially high school children, if they are college bound, ready for it? I am not asking about ACT scores, GPAs, and career counseling; rather, are they spiritually ready? Young people—and this is a question I too had to ask myself—are you using your high school years wisely so that you are firmly rooted in the truth of God’s Word? The high school years are so critical. The world says these years are for partying, drunkenness, constant entertainment, and foolish behavior, but we know better. Do not wait until college to start becoming serious about your spiritual life—by then, really, it is too late. You are then like an immature plant leaving the greenhouse only to face the threatening elements. If you are blessed with a Christian high school, learn and listen closely to your teachers’ wise counsel about college; grow in your understanding and appreciation for God as he reveals himself in the creation, and especially in his Word. Learn your doctrine well in catechism, and strive to live it out and love it; hold the confessions close to you; take in and be nourished by the preaching. Pray that God would make you to grow in the faith and love him more.

The Bible exhorts us often to be strong and to continue in the Word. The apostle Paul said to Timothy, a young pastor at the time, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”^[2] And again, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou has learned them.”^[3] Jesus highlighted the importance of truth and continuing in it in his ministry as well: “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”^[4] The Word of God is full of such exhortations.

The strong Christian, entirely by God’s grace, is able to stand in the college years. A solidly rooted Christian knows where he or she stands, and never forsakes it. As you are in college, do not be afraid to ask your pastor, parents, past teachers, and friends questions about matters that bother you, especially concerning your experiences in college. Attend your post-high Bible study faithfully, seeking the godly advice of your

leader and peers there. Stay connected with your Christian friends as much as possible. The years immediately following high school can be a time in which young people lose touch somewhat with their network of believers at church, so it is important to maintain that communication and fellowship, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...”^[5] God uses those means to keep you strong as you increasingly move from the shelter of home, church, and school to the worldly influences of post-secondary schooling.

Next time, Lord willing, we will consider postmodernism as it is found in emergent churches of our day, partly taking a look at Rob Bell, the focus of recent media attention.