

Text: Mt 13.16-19

Well, this sermon also comes from my reading.

I recently finished a book that rebuts some arguments unbelievers make against Christianity. The book has some technical aspects, but I will give you its title:

The Heresy of Orthodoxy

How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity has Reshaped our Understanding of Early Christianity

Now, I'm not doing this message (and subsequent messages) as a book report. If you want to read the book, that's fine, the authors are orthodox men with good reputations. One of the author's is a Baptist and the other is a Presbyterian. There are probably areas where I disagree with both, but they are both outstanding Bible teachers.

What I want to do today is explain the attack this book is refuting, and with that in mind show some of the biblical teachings that clearly demolish the arguments the attack is making.

Today we will focus on one central teaching that shows the orthodoxy of orthodoxy. I'm thinking of doing several further messages drawn from my notes in this book to champion the orthodoxy of orthodoxy.

Note: by orthodoxy, I don't mean the Orthodox Church (an institution) but orthodox doctrine – the fundamentals of the faith.

My sermonic structure will be a little odd today. My first point explains the challenge we face, orthodoxy under attack. Then we will go to my second point, the first biblical response we will make to this attack. So the Scripture reading and proposition will come a bit later.

I. The challenge posed as “the heresy of orthodoxy”

A. The roots of the challenge: Walter Bauer

1. Walter Bauer (b. 1877, d. 1960) “was a German theologian, lexicographer, and scholar of early church history.”¹

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010), 24.

2. Best known for the pre-eminent Greek lexicon (which I have)
 3. *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, written in 1934
 4. Thesis: Christianity grew out of many competing beliefs to coalesce around the “orthodoxy” that emerged with the church councils between the 4th and 6th centuries.
 5. Partly a result of the Roman church exerting its authority over the other churches and forcing their views on the whole church
 6. Various reactions: liberals tended to embrace, conservatives criticize, mostly in the scholarly realm
- B. The challenge gained more popular acceptance
1. Writing of Elaine Pagels since 1979 (prof. religion at Princeton)
 2. Writing of Bart Ehrman since 2003 (prof. religious studies at UNC Chapel Hill)
- C. Four major criticisms
1. Undue guess work — “First, Bauer’s conclusions were unduly conjectural in light of the limited nature of the available evidence and in some cases arguments from silence altogether.”²
 2. Ignored New Testament itself — “Second, Bauer unduly neglected the New Testament evidence and anachronistically used second-century data to describe the nature of ‘earliest’ (first-century) Christianity.”³
 3. Oversimplified history — “Third, Bauer grossly oversimplified the first-century picture, which was considerably more complex than Bauer’s portrayal suggested.”⁴
 4. Ignored existing standards — “Fourth, Bauer neglected existing theological standards in the early church.”⁵

² Köstenberger and Kruger, 33.

³ Köstenberger and Kruger, 33.

⁴ Köstenberger and Kruger, 33.

⁵ Köstenberger and Kruger, 33.

II. A first response: the rock on which we stand (Mt 16.13-19)

Read Mt 16.13-19

Proposition: The Lord Jesus himself set the standard for orthodoxy: the confession of Christ.

A. The critical question: Who is the Son of Man? (13)

1. I have often said that the first point of theology is Inspiration, because we get all our truth from the Bible
2. However, the critical question underlying all our theology is “Who is Jesus?”
 - a. If he is just a man, we have nothing
 - b. If he is the God-man, as the Bible say, we have everything

B. The responses of unbelief (14)

1. Varied responses

- a. John the Baptist (brought back to life?)
- b. Elijah
- c. Jeremiah
- d. Or some other of the prophets

By “unbelief” I don’t mean to say they were deliberate in unbelief, but confused.

2. Meaning of the response: There was considerable diversity of thought even during Jesus life-time about “who is Jesus”

C. The response of faith (15-19)

1. Content of the response

- a. You are the Christ: you are the promised Messiah of Israel
- b. You are the son of the Living God: you are more than mere man (though Peter may not have fully understood all this meant at the time)

2. Jesus' commendation:

- a. You received this by revelation, not from a human source, but from God (17)
- b. On this rock (the statement) I will build my church (18)
 - 1) The statement is foundational
 - 2) The statement sets a standard

"Jesus accepted only one belief as accurate."⁶

- c. Based on this rock, I give you (apostles) founding authority in the church (19)

D. Echoes of the confession

Jn 6.69 "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

Ac 18.5 ¶ But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul *began* devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

Rm 10.9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

1 Jn 4.2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;

1 Jn 4.3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

2 Jn 1.7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.

1. All of these writings are the products of the 1st century, the apostolic age

⁶ Köstenberger and Kruger, 74.

2. They confess the universally held truth, centering the church on the orthodox doctrine of Christ

Conclusion:

Proposition: The Lord Jesus himself set the standard for orthodoxy: the confession of Christ.

We should not allow the claims of unbelievers to shake our faith in Christ in any way.

It is wise to examine false claims to find the error, but they always show themselves as short-sighted and inadequate when examined carefully.