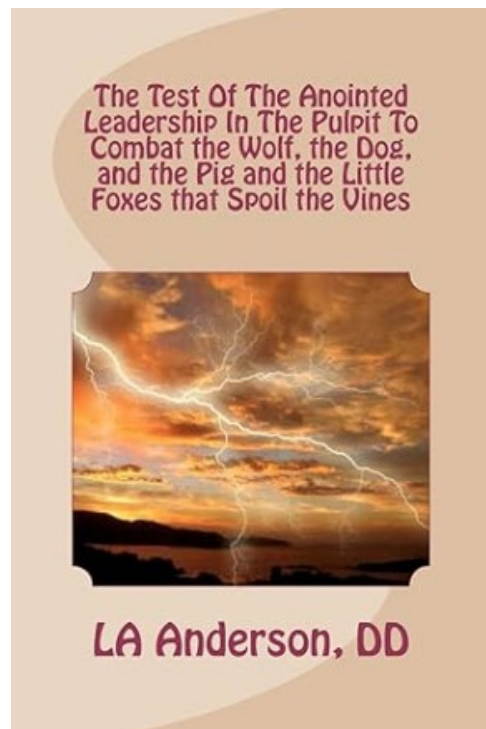




The Accountability of Leadership – the value of Godly leaders moving into the principles and doctrines of God's word.

The Book of Jude

Answer: Author: Jude 1 identifies the author of the Book of Jude as Jude, a brother of James. This likely refers to Jesus' half-brother Jude, as Jesus also had a half-brother named James {Matthew 13:55}. Jude likely does not identify himself as a brother of Jesus out of humility and reverence for Christ.

Date of Writing: The Book of Jude is closely related to the book of 2 Peter. The date of authorship for Jude depends on whether Jude used content from 2 Peter or Peter used content from Jude when writing 2 Peter. The Book of Jude was written somewhere between A.D. 60 and 80.

Purpose of Writing: The Book of Jude is an important book for us today because it is written for the end times, for the end of the church age. The church age began at the Day of Pentecost. Jude is the only book given entirely to the great apostasy. Jude writes that evil works are the evidence of apostasy. He admonishes us to contend for the faith, for there are tares among the wheat. False prophets are in the church and the saints are in danger. Jude is a small but important book worthy of study, written for the Christian of today.

Brief Summary: According to verse 3., Jude was anxious to write about our salvation; however, he changed topics to address contending for the faith. This faith embodies the complete body of Christian doctrine taught by Christ, later passed on to the apostles. After Jude warns of false teachers (verses 4-16), he advises us on how we can succeed in spiritual warfare (verses 20-21). Here is wisdom we would do well to accept and adhere to as we go through these days of the end times.

Connections: The Book of Jude is filled with references to the Old Testament, including the Exodus (v. 5); Satan's rebellion (v. 6); Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7); Moses' death (v. 9); Cain (v. 11); Balaam (v. 11); Korah (v. 11); Enoch (w. 14,15); and Adam (v. 14). Jude's use of the well-known historical illustrations of Sodom and Gomorrah, Balaam, and Korah reminded the Jewish Christians of the necessity of true faith and obedience.

Practical Application: We live in a unique time in history and this little book can help equip us for the untold challenges of living in the end times. Today's Christian must be on guard for false doctrines which can so easily deceive us if we are not well-versed in the Word. We need to know the Gospel-to protect and defend it-and accept the Lordship of Christ, which is evidenced by a life-change. Authentic faith always reflects Christ-like behavior. Our life in Christ should reflect our very own heart-knowledge that rests on the authority of the Almighty Creator and Father who puts faith into practice. We need that personal relationship with Him; only then will we know His voice so well that we will follow no other.

Key Verses:

Jude 3: "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."

Jude 18: "But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, 'In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.' These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit."

Jude 24-25: "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

WHAT DOES JUDE 1:4 MEAN?

ESV: For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

NIV: For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

NASB: For certain people have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into indecent behavior and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

CSB: For some people, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into sensuality and denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord.

NLT: I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

KJV: For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

NKJV: For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse Commentary:

Jude explains why his readers should aggressively defend the truth. As predicted, immoral men had crept into the membership of first-century churches. Jude describes them as ungodly, accusing them of claiming that God's grace allowed them to lead an immoral life. According to Jude, they even rejected the fact that Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority and Lord. It seems these apostates believed it was acceptable to give in to the body's evil desires. The apostates' character, conduct, and condemnation had been predicted (Isaiah 8:19-22; 2 Thessalonians 2:6-10; 1 Timothy 4:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; 2 Peter 2:1-9).

Writing in Romans 6:1-2 the apostle Paul responds to those who think God's grace allows them to keep on sinning. He asks, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" His answer is dramatic: "By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" The apostle Peter also contradicts the false teaching that grace permits immoral living, writing: "but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16).

1:4 - For certain have crept in unnoticed long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Book of Jude is a brief letter in the New Testament, written by Jude, the brother of James, and it is primarily focused on the issue of false teachers and their corrupting influence on the early Christian community. The primary purpose of the book is to exhort believers to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints and to be vigilant against false teachings and immoral behavior.

In the context of Jude 1:4, the verse is introducing the main issue that the letter addresses: the infiltration of false teachers within the Christian community. These individuals *have* entered congregation unnoticed, meaning they have managed to blend in with the genuine believer and may even appear to be faithful members of the community.

The verse states that these men were "marked out for this condemnation long ago, which implies that their judgment has already been determined by God due to their ungodly natural actions. They are characterized as "ungodly men" who pervert the grace of God into an excuse for immoral behavior ("lewdness"). By doing so, they effectively deny the lordship of both God the Father and Jesus Christ, as their actions are incompatible with a true understanding and submission to God's authority.

The false teachers' notion that it doesn't matter whether the body is morally clean or unclean is addressed clearly in Romans 12:1, where the apostle Paul urges believers to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. The body may be used to honor God or to offend Him. (Romans 6:12-14).

Verse Context:

Jude 1:1-4 begins this letter by identifying the writer and his readers. The author is a brother of James and a half-brother of Jesus Christ. In this introduction, he extends his personal greetings to his readers and explains his reason for writing to them.

Chapter Summary:

Jude's brief letter describes men at their worst and God at His best. Believers are already on the victorious side! Those who mock God's truth and who follow their own desires all while claiming to be Christians, are the most dangerous kind of unbelievers. These persons pose a danger to themselves and to any Christians they might influence. In response, Christians need to focus on understanding the truth of God's written Word and submitting to His will.

Chapter Context:

Jude is a single-chapter letter which reflects earlier warnings about apostates and their false teachings. Other passages of Scripture describe evil men who taught that Jesus was not fully human or fully God (1 John 2:22; 4:1-3), that God's grace allowed them to live immorally (2 Peter 2; Romans 6:1, 15), that Jesus blood was not an adequate sacrifice (Galatians 1:6-9; Hebrews 3:12-19; 10:19), and sinners gain a right standing in God's sight by keeping the law of Moses (Galatians 5:4, 7-9). Jude's letter combats false teaching and exhorts readers to remain faithful to the Lord.

Book Summary:

The book of Jude is a letter written by a half-brother of Jesus, likely later than AD 66-67, which was after 2 Peter was written. Its placement immediately before the book of Revelation is appropriate. This letter warns about false religion and evil men, whom Revelation describes as maliciously affecting political and religious conditions.

CLOUDS WITHOUT WATER- JUDE 1:12

Question: "What does "clouds without water" mean (Jude 1:12)?"

Answer: Scripture abounds with metaphors, allegories, and other figures of speech. For instance, in Jude 1:12, the author mentions "clouds without water" to describe false teachers who fail to deliver on their promises. To understand the significance of this expression, let us review the context of Jude 1:12.

Jude, the brother of James and half-brother of Jesus (see Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3), addresses the ubiquity of false teachers and the consequent rise of apostates. *Apostasy* is defined as "the abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief." Apparently, many believers had abandoned the truth of the gospel to embrace the lies of false teachers. For this reason, Jude urges believers to contend for the faith (Jude 1:3-4).

In Jude 1:11, the author compares false teachers to Cain (Genesis 4:5-8), Balaam (Numbers 22:5-7; 2 Peter 2:15), and Korah (Numbers 16:1-3, 31-35). That is, the false teachers are characterized by Cain's hatred and jealousy, Balaam's lust for selfish gain, and Korah's rebellious spirit. Such qualities are antithetical to the gospel.

Next, Jude describes false teachers as "hidden reefs at your love feasts" (Jude 1:12). In the early church, love feasts were communal meals shared among Christians. The primary purpose of these meals was for the sake of fellowship (Acts 2:46-47; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34).

Unfortunately, false teachers had infiltrated these love feasts and lurked unnoticed, like hidden reefs, ready to shipwreck souls without warning. Here, we are reminded of Judas, who shared a meal with the Lord and His disciples, even though he had already decided to betray Christ (John 13:2, 21-30). Although the disciples did not know who would betray the Lord, Jesus was not caught off guard by Judas' spineless behavior.

These self-indulgent teachers "feast with [us] without fear" (Jude 1:12). Pretending to be "shepherds," they feed only themselves. This is how Jesus spoke about false shepherds in John 10:12-13: "He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep." Jesus, however, is the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11, 14-15).

False teachers can also be likened to "waterless clouds" (Jude 1:12) and "waterless springs" (2 Peter 2:17). In other words, they cannot deliver on their promises. When we see a sky full of clouds bringing the promise of a refreshing rain, we expect some moisture. When the clouds pass by without so much as a drizzle, we are disappointed. The false teachers are like those waterless clouds. They talk a good talk, but there is nothing to show for it.

They promise spiritual refreshment, but none ever comes. They make a show of their knowledge and gifts, but no one benefits. The ancient word of the wise applies to them: "like clouds and wind without rain is one who boasts of gifts never given" (Proverbs 25:14).

When people set their expectation on "waterless clouds," they will continue in their dry and parched condition. When they drink the "water" offered by the false teachers, they "will be thirsty again" (John 4:13). Only Jesus can provide thirst-quenching, soul-satisfying water unto eternal life (John 4:14).

Only He provides the showers of blessing we need. Because false teachers are disconnected from the true source of life, they are like "fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted" (Jude 1:12). Conversely, genuine believers produce fruit that leads to righteousness and eternal life (Galatians 5:22-23).

So, how do we spot false teachers? We look at the fruit they produce (or fail to produce). We look at the clouds and the rain they give (or fail to give). That tells us everything we need to know about them (Matthew 7:15-20).

WHAT IS "THE MOST HOLY FAITH" - JUDE 20

Question: "What is "the most holy faith" (Jude 20)?"

Answer: In Jude 1:17-23, the writer calls believers to remain faithful in their walk with God. He reminds his friends in Christ of the apostles' predictions-that false teachers, scoffers, and faithless people would come into the church and try to divide and tear them down. Jude urges the church to resist all such efforts: "But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith" (verse 20, NLT).

The "most holy faith" is the bedrock of our spiritual life, the belief in the saving work of Jesus Christ accomplished through His death and resurrection. The apostle Paul gives a similar prompting: "And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught" (Colossians 2:6-7, NLT).

Jude encourages readers "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (Jude 1:3). The most holy faith-the believer's trust in Jesus Christ and the message of the gospel-is the "very faith" Paul preached but had once "tried to destroy" (Galatians 1:23, NLT). After his conversion, Paul would fight "the good fight" of faith for the rest of his life (2 Timothy 4:7) and urge fellow believers to do the same: "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:12).

Jude calls it the "most holy" faith because it is singularly set apart from all the rest (Ephesians 4:4-6). The body of doctrine we hold-the faith we cling to-must remain pure and uncorrupted by false teaching and flashy new doctrinal additives (Galatians 1:6-9). For this reason, the author of Hebrews warns, "Do not be attracted by strange, new ideas. Your strength comes from God's grace, not from rules about food, which don't help those who follow them" (Hebrews 13:9, NLT). Strange and divisive teachings tear down our faith and lead us away from the path God has planned for us. Peter instructs, "Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment" (1 Peter 2:2, NLT).

Building ourselves up in the most holy faith involves a daily determination to learn as much as we can about the untainted truth of God's Word and then obey it and live by it (see James 1:22-25; see also Acts 20:32; Hebrews 5:12; Titus 1:9). God gives us His Word to teach, correct, prepare, and equip us for "every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The earliest believers strengthened themselves in the most holy faith when they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).

Jude discloses the key to building ourselves up in the most holy faith, and that is "praying in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 1:20). God's Word and prayer is the dynamic duo of spiritual growth (see Acts 6:4). Praying in the Holy Spirit "helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (Romans 8:26-28, NLT). When a Christian yields to the Spirit and is led by the Spirit in prayer, God can direct that person in His will and purposes. As a result, growth in faith is accomplished.

The most holy faith is the foundation of our Christian lives. The apostle Paul explains, "Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have-Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:10-11, NLT). Christ Jesus Himself is "the chief cornerstone" of our faith (Ephesians 2:20). Believers must "stand firm in the faith" and hold to their confession of trust in Jesus Christ until the end (1 Corinthians 16:13; Philippians 1:27; Hebrews 3:14; 1 Timothy 6:20-21).

WHAT DID THESE FALSE TEACHERS DO TO CAUSE DECEPTION?

In Jude 1:4, the phrase they crept in unawares refers to false teachers who infiltrated the Christian community secretly, perverting God's grace and denying the Lord Jesus Christ, prompting Jude to urge believers to contend for the faith.

Here's more detailed explanation of the key points:

Who are the "men"

Jude is referring to false teachers who have infiltrated the Christian community, posing as genuine believers.

"Crept in unawares":

This phrase emphasizes the stealthy and unnoticed way these false teachers entered the fellowship, suggesting they blended in and appeared to be genuine.

Why Jude is concerned:

Jude is concerned because these false teachers are not only distorting the truth of the Gospel but also using it as an excuse for immoral behavior, denying the authority of God and Jesus Christ.

What does Jude urge his readers to do

Jude urges his readers to contend for the faith and to be vigilant in identifying and opposing these false teachers.

Jude 1:10 further describes these people as those who blaspheme what they do not understand and are destroyed by what they understand instinctively, like unreasonable animals.

Our Job in the Faith- Contending for the Faith

Question: "What does it mean to contend for the faith?"

Answer: The epistle of Jude is written to Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem. In the opening passages, the author explains that he had initially intended to write a general letter of encouragement on the topic of "the salvation we share." Instead, Jude explains, "I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (Jude 1:3).

Jude is concerned because "the faith"-the Christian message of the gospel under attack from false teachers who are spreading dangerous heresies. Jude urges his readers to contend for the faith against those who seek to undermine and erode it. The Greek word Jude chooses, translated "contend earnestly;" usually describes an athlete striving with extreme intensity to win the victory in a physical competition. The Amplified Bible translates the command as "fight strenuously for [the defense of] the faith."

Jude wants all believers to contend earnestly for the faith. A true contender vigorously endeavors to win the competition, not holding anything back. In this case, the struggle is for "the faith," which is the saving truth of Jesus Christ and His teachings (2 Corinthians 11:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 1:2).

Since this faith was "entrusted to God's holy people," all believers, not just Christian leaders, are called to defend the truth of Jesus Christ. And since this faith was entrusted "once for all," Jude intends to stand against those who claim to receive "new" revelations of truth. Through Christ's personal teachings and the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has already given the full message of truth to the apostles (John 14:26; 16:12-13). Paul gives a similar warning not to let anyone pervert the gospel of Christ with new and different teachings (Galatians 1:6-9). God has spoken, and any new, continuing, or special revelations of "truth" are to be rejected.

The two basic false teachings Jude contends with are stated in verse Jude 1:4: "For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord." First, Jude opposes the false teachers in their sanctioning of immoral behavior-they "pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality." Second, Jude calls them on their rejection of the deity of Christ-they "deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."

The faith entrusted to God's holy people for which they must contend is grounded in Jesus Christ. He is the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16), He is God with us (Matthew 1:23), He is the Word, and He is God made flesh (John 1:1-18).

This faith is expressed through holy living to which all believers are called (Leviticus 20:7; 1 Peter 1:16; Romans 6:1-14; 12:1).

Several verses in the New Testament reinforce Jude's call to contend for the faith. Paul charges Timothy to fight the "good fight of faith" as a soldier of God in pursuit of holy living, persistent service, and defending the gospel (1 Timothy 6:11-21). To the church in Corinth, Paul advises believers to see themselves as runners in a race who "(run in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). To the Philippian church, Paul writes, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). Fight, run, and strive-in other words, "contend earnestly" for the faith.

In a practical sense, what does it mean to contend for the faith? What does contending for the faith look like? Fortunately, the book of Jude sets out several disciplines showing us how to contend for the faith:

Build yourself up in the faith (Jude 1:20). We are to keep pressing ourselves to grow spiritually. A big part of spiritual development involves reading and studying God's Word so that we know and understand it. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). The inspired Word of God has the power to teach, train, rebuke, and correct us in righteousness so that as God's servants we are wholly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Pray in the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:20). By praying under the direction of the Holy Spirit, we receive help in our human weakness to understand God's truth and not be deceived by false teachers (Romans 8:26).

Keep yourself in God's love (Jude 1:21). Staying in God's love means living by faith and obedience to God. Jesus told us, "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love" (John 15:10). We obey God because He has captivated our hearts and won our allegiance (Romans 6:17). The ultimate expression of our obedience to God is shown through our loving others (1 John 3:11-24; 1 Peter 1:22).

Wait with hope (Jude 1:21). To contend for the faith, we must keep the fire of hope alive in our hearts. When Jude says to wait "expectantly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life," he is referring to living every moment of life with the confident expectation that Jesus Christ may return at any moment (Titus 2:13).

Taking a look at what is false doctrine

Question: "What is false doctrine?"

Answer: Doctrine is "a set of ideas or beliefs that are taught or believed to be true. Biblical doctrine refers to teachings that align with the revealed Word of God, the Bible. False doctrine is any idea that adds to, takes away from, contradicts, or nullifies the doctrine given in God's Word. For example, any teaching about Jesus that denies His virgin birth is a false doctrine, because it contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture (Matthew 1:18).

As early as the first century AD, false doctrine was already infiltrating the church, and many of the letters in the New Testament were written to address those errors (Galatians 1:6-9; Colossians 2:20-23; Titus 1:10-11). Paul exhorted his protege, Timothy, to guard against those who were peddling heresies and confusing the flock: "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing." (1 Timothy 6:3-4)

As followers of Christ, we have no excuse for remaining ignorant of theology because we have the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) available to us-the Bible is complete. As we "study to show ourselves approved unto God" (2 Timothy 2:15), we are less likely to be taken in by smooth talkers and false prophets. When we know God's Word, "we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14).

It is important to point out the difference between false doctrine and denominational disagreements. Different congregational groups see secondary issues in Scripture differently. These differences are not always due to false doctrine on anyone's part. Church policies, governmental decisions, style of worship, etc., are all open for discussion, since they are not directly addressed in Scripture. Even those issues that are addressed in Scripture are often debated by equally sincere disciples of Christ. Differences in interpretation or practice do not necessarily qualify as false doctrine, nor should they divide the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:10).

False doctrine is that which opposes some fundamental truth or that which is necessary for salvation. The following are some examples of false doctrine:

The erasing of hell. The Bible describes hell as a real place of eternal torment, the destination for every unregenerate soul (Revelation 20:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:8). A denial of hell directly contradicts Jesus' own words (Matthew 10:28; 25:46) and is therefore a false doctrine.

The idea that there are "many paths to God." This philosophy has become popular recently under the guise of tolerance. This false doctrine claims that, since God is love, He will accept any religious effort as long as the practitioner is sincere. Such relativism flies in the face of the entire Bible and effectively eliminates any need for the Son of God to take on flesh and be crucified for us (Jeremiah 12:17; John 3:15-18). It also contradicts Jesus' direct words that He is the only way to God (John 14:6).

Any teaching that redefines the person of Jesus Christ. Doctrine that denies the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, His sinless nature, His actual death, or His physical resurrection is false doctrine. A group's errant Christology readily identifies it as a sect or cult that may claim to be Christian but is actually teaching false doctrine. Even many mainline denominations have begun the rapid slide into apostasy by declaring that they no longer hold to a literal interpretation of Scripture or the deity of Christ. First John 4:1-3 makes it clear that a denial of biblical Christology is "anti-Christ." Jesus described false teachers within the church as "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15).

Teaching that adds human religious works to Christ's finished work on the cross as necessary ingredients for salvation. This teaching may pay lip service to salvation by faith alone but insists that a religious ritual (such as water baptism) is salvific. Some groups even legislate hairstyles, clothing options, and food consumption. Romans 11:6 warns against attempts to mix grace with works. Ephesians 2:8-9 says we are saved by the grace of God, through faith, and nothing we do can add to or take away from it. Galatians 1:6-9 pronounces a curse on anyone who changes the good news of salvation by grace.

The teaching that presents grace as a license to sin. Sometimes called "easy believism," this false doctrine implies that all one must do for right standing with God is to believe the facts about Jesus, pray a prayer at some point, and then resume control of one's life with the assurance of heaven at the end. Paul dealt with this thinking in Romans 6.

In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus warned those who adopt this doctrine that they did not know Him at all. Second Corinthians 5:17 states that those who are "in Christ" become "new creatures." That transformation, in response to a believer's faith in Christ, changes the outward behaviors. To know and follow Christ is to obey Him (Luke 6:46).

Satan has been confusing and perverting the Word of God since the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-4; Matthew 4:6). False teachers, the servants of Satan, try to appear as "servants of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:15), but they will be known by their fruits (Matthew 7:16). A charlatan promoting false doctrine will show signs of pride, greed, and rebellion (see Jude 1:11) and will often promote or engage in sexual immorality (2 Peter 2:14; Revelation 2:20).

We are wise to recognize how vulnerable we are to heresy and make it our habit to do as the Bereans did in Acts 17:11: "They examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." When we make it our goal to follow the lead of the first church, we will go far in avoiding the pitfalls of false doctrine. Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Such devotion will protect us and ensure we do not fall away.

What is Apostasy and how can I recognize it?

Question: What is Apostasy and how can I recognize it

Answer: Apostasy, from the Greek word *apostasia*, means a defiance of an established system or authority; a rebellion, an abandonment or breach of faith. In the first-century world, apostasy was a technical term for political revolt or defection. Just like in the first century, spiritual apostasy threatens the Body of Christ today.

The Bible warns about people like Arius (c. AD 250-336), a Christian priest from Alexandria, Egypt, who was trained at Antioch in the early fourth century. About AD 318, Arius accused Bishop Alexander of Alexandria of subscribing to Sabellianism, a false teaching that asserted that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were merely roles or modes assumed by God at various times.

Arius was determined to emphasize the oneness of God; however, he went too far in his teaching of God's nature. Arius denied the Trinity and introduced what appeared on the surface to be an inconsequential difference between the Father and Son.

Arius argued that Jesus was not *homoousios* ("of the same essence") as the Father, but was rather *homoiousios* ("of similar essence"). Only one Greek letter-the iota (i)-separated the two. Arius described his position in this manner: "The Father existed before the Son. There was a time when the Son did not exist. Therefore, the Son was created by the Father. Therefore, although the Son was the highest of all creatures, he was not of the essence of God."

Arius was clever and did his best to get the people on his side, even going so far as to compose little songs that taught his theology, which he tried to teach to everyone who would listen. His winsome nature, asceticism, and revered position as a preacher also contributed to his cause.

With respect to apostasy, it is critical that all Christians understand two important things: (1) how to recognize apostasy and apostate teachers, and (2) why apostate teaching is so deadly.

The Forms of Apostasy

To fully identify and combat apostasy, Christians should understand its various forms and the traits that characterize its doctrines and teachers. As to the forms of apostasy, there are two main types: (1) a falling away from key and true doctrines of the Bible into heretical teachings that claim to be "the real" Christian doctrine, and (2) a complete renunciation of the Christian faith, which results in a full abandonment of Christ.

Arius represents the first form of apostasy-a denial of key Christian truths (such as the divinity of Christ) that begins a downhill slide into a full departure from the faith, which is the second form of apostasy. The second form almost always begins with the first. A heretical belief becomes a heretical teaching that splinters and grows until it pollutes all aspects of a person's faith, and then the end goal of Satan is accomplished, which is a complete falling away from Christianity.

A 2010 study by Daniel Dennett and Linda LaScola called "Preachers Who Are Not Believers." Dennett and LaScola's work chronicles five different preachers who over time were presented with and accepted heretical teachings about Christianity and now have completely fallen away from the faith. These pastors are either pantheists or clandestine atheists. One of the most disturbing truths highlighted in the study is that these preachers maintain their position as pastors of Christian churches with their congregations being unaware of their leader's true spiritual state.

The Characteristics of Apostasy and Apostates

Jude was the half-brother of Jesus and a leader in the early church. In his New Testament letter, he outlines how to recognize apostasy and strongly urges those in the body of Christ to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 1:3). The Greek word translated "contend earnestly" is a compound verb from which we get the word agonize. It is in the present infinitive form, which means that the struggle will be continuous. In other words, Jude says that there will be a constant fight against false teaching and that Christians should take it so seriously that we "agonize" over the fight in which we are engaged. Moreover, Jude makes it clear that every Christian is called to this fight, not just church leaders, so it is critical that all believers sharpen their discernment skills so that they can recognize and prevent apostasy in their midst.

After urging his readers to contend earnestly for the faith, Jude highlights the reason: "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4). In this one verse, Jude provides Christians with three traits of apostasy and apostate teachers:

First, Jude says that apostasy can be subtle. Apostates have "crept" into the church. In extra-biblical Greek, the term Jude uses describes the cunning craftiness of a lawyer who, through clever argumentation, infiltrates the minds of courtroom officials and corrupts their thinking. The word literally means "slip in sideways; come in stealthily; sneak in!" In other words, Jude says it is rare that apostasy begins in an overt and easily detectable manner. Instead, it looks a lot like Arius's doctrine—only a single letter, the iota, differentiates the false teaching from the true.

Describing this aspect of apostasy and its underlying danger, A. W. Tozer wrote, "So skilled is error at imitating truth, that the two are constantly being mistaken for each other. It takes a sharp eye these days to know which brother is Cain and which is Abel." The apostle Paul also speaks to the outwardly pleasing behavior of apostates and their teaching: "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). In other words, do not look for apostates to appear bad on the outside or speak dramatic words on their own agenda, but, as pastor R. C. Lensky has noted, "The worst forms of wickedness consist in perversions of the truth."

Second, Jude describes apostates as "ungodly" and as those who use God's grace as a license to commit unrighteous acts. Beginning with "ungodly," Jude describes eighteen unflattering traits of apostates: they are ungodly (Jude 1:4), morally perverted (verse 4), denying Christ (verse 4), ones who defile the flesh (verse 8), rebellious (verse 8), people who revile angels (verse 8), who are ignorant about God (verse 8), those who proclaim false visions (verse 10), self-destructive (verse 10), grumblers (verse 16), faultfinders (verse 16), self-satisfying (verse 16), people who use arrogant words and false flattery (verse 16), mockers of God (verse 18), those who cause divisions (verse 19), worldly minded (verse 19), and finally (and not surprisingly), devoid of the Spirit/unsaved (verse 19).

Third, Jude says apostates "deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." How do apostates do this? Paul tells us in his letter to Titus, "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed" (Titus 1:15-16). Through their unrighteous behavior, the apostates show their true selves. Unlike an apostate, a true believer is someone who has been delivered from sin to righteousness in Christ and who refuses to continue in sin (Romans 6:1-2).

Ultimately, the sign of an apostate is that he eventually falls away and departs from the truth of God's Word and His righteousness. The apostle John signifies this is a mark of a false believer: "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us" (1 John 2:19).

Ideas Have Consequences

Every New Testament book except Philemon contains warnings about false teaching. Why is this? Simply because ideas have consequences. Right thinking and its fruit produce goodness, whereas wrong thinking and its accompanying action result in undesired penalties. As an example, the Cambodian killing fields in the 1970s were the product of the nihilistic worldview of Jean Paul Sartre and his teaching. The Khmer Rouge's leader, Pol Pot, lived out Sartre's philosophy toward the people in a clear and frightening way, which was articulated in this manner: "To keep you is no benefit. To destroy you is no loss."

Satan did not come to the first couple in the Garden with an external armament or visible weapon; instead, he came to them with an idea. And it was that idea, embraced by Adam and Eve, that condemned them and the rest of humankind, with the only remedy being the sacrificial death of God's Son. The great tragedy is that, knowingly or unknowingly, the apostate teacher dooms his unsuspecting followers.

Speaking to His disciples about the religious leaders of His day, Jesus declared if the blind lead the blind they will both fall into the pit. (Matthew 15:14, emphasis added). Alarmingly, it is not only false teachers who go to destruction, but their disciples follow them there. Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard put it this way: "For it has never yet been known to fail that one fool, when he goes astray, takes several others with him."

Conclusion

In A.D. 325, the Council of Nicea convened primarily to take up the issue of Arius and his teaching. Much to Arius's dismay, the end result was his excommunication and a statement in the Nicene Creed that affirms Christ's divinity: "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father.

Arius may have died centuries ago, but his spiritual children are still with us to this day in the form of cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses and others who deny Christ's true essence and person. Sadly, until Christ returns and every last spiritual enemy has been removed, tares such as these will be present among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30).

In fact, Scripture says apostasy will only get worse as Christ's return approaches. "At that time [the latter days] many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another" (Matthew 24:10). Paul told the Thessalonians that a great falling away would precede Christ's second coming (2 Thessalonians 2:3) and that the end times would be characterized by tribulation and hollow religious charlatans: "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be . . . holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these" {2 Timothy 3:1-2, 5}.

It is critical, now more than ever, that every believer pray for discernment, combat apostasy, and contend earnestly for the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints

What are false Apostles?

Answer: False apostles are people who masquerade as Christian leaders, get other people to follow them, and then lead them astray. A true apostle is one who is "sent" by God as an ambassador of Jesus Christ with a divine message. A false apostle is a pretender who does not truly represent Christ and whose message is false.

In 2 Corinthians 11, the apostle Paul addresses the problem of false apostles invading the Corinthian church. He describes the false apostles as "those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about" (verse 12). The book of 2 Corinthians is one of Paul's more "sarcastic" letters, as he contends with the church to recognize the error that had crept into their midst. He contrasts his selfless service with that of the "super-apostles" (verse 5) who were seducing the church with their smooth speech and apparent wisdom. These impostors were pretending to be true servants of Christ, but they did not know the Lord. They were deceivers, preying on gullible Christians in Corinth to profit themselves and boost their ego. Paul chides the church that they "even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face" (verse 20). He even compares these impostors to Satan himself, who also "masquerades as an angel of light" (verse 14).

Paul warned the Ephesian elders about false apostles as well: "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29). They must have heeded his words, because in Revelation 2:2, Jesus commends the church at Ephesus for spotting the false apostles in their midst and rejecting them.

False teachers and false apostles have been plentiful throughout the history of the church. They still infiltrate unsuspecting churches and have even led whole denominations into heresy and apostasy (see 1 Timothy 4:1-4). Scripture gives us clear warning if we will pay attention. First John 4:1 says, "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."

The following are some ways we can identify false apostles:

False apostles deny any or all truths about the identity and deity of Jesus Christ. In 1 John 4:3-4, John warns his readers against Gnostic teaching; the test, he says, is Christological: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God!" There are many ways a spirit may deny that Jesus is the Christ. From demonic cults to denominations that have veered away from the gospel, evil spirits are always behind the slander of Jesus. Any teacher who attempts to take away from or add to Jesus' finished work on the cross for our salvation is a false prophet (John 19:30; Acts 4:12).

False apostles are motivated by their greed, lust, or power. Second Timothy 3:1-8 describes such teachers in more detail: "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people."

"They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth."

They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected." Jesus said that an identifying mark of a "false apostle/prophet is sinful behavior: "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:16, 20; Jude 1:4).

False apostles distort or deny the Bible as God's infallible, inspired Word (2 Timothy 3:16). In Galatians 1:8-9 Paul counters legalism with these strong words: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (KJV). The inspired writings of the apostles are part of the Word of God, and no one has the right to change their message.

False apostles refuse to make themselves subject to spiritual authorities, but consider themselves the final authority (Hebrews 13:7; 2 Corinthians 10:12). They will often adopt lofty- sounding titles for themselves, such as "Bishop," "Apostle," "Reverend," or "Father." This does *not* mean that every person carrying such titles is a false prophet, only that evil impostors love lofty titles and will self-title to gain a hearing.

False apostles can arise anywhere the Word of God does not reign supreme. From organized churches to home Bible studies, we must always be on guard against "new teachings" or "revelations" that are not subject to the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

How can I recognize a false teacher/false prophet?

Answer: Jesus warned us that "false Christs and false prophets" will come and will attempt to deceive even God's elect {Matthew 24:23-27; see also 2 Peter 3:3 and Jude 17-18). The best way to guard yourself against falsehood and false teachers is to know the truth. To spot a counterfeit, study the real thing. Any believer who "correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15) and who makes a careful study of the Bible can identify false doctrine. For example, a believer who has read the activities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in Matthew 3:16-17 will immediately question any doctrine that denies the Trinity. Therefore, step one is to study the Bible and judge all teaching by what the Scripture says. Jesus said "a tree is recognized by its fruit" (Matthew 12:33). When looking for "fruit," here are three specific tests to apply to any teacher to determine the accuracy of his or her teaching:

What does this teacher say about Jesus? In Matthew 16:15-16, Jesus asks, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,"¹¹ and for this answer Peter is called "blessed." In 2 John 9, we read, "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son." In other words, Jesus Christ and His work of redemption is of utmost importance; beware of anyone who denies that Jesus is equal with God, who downplays Jesus' sacrificial death, or who rejects Jesus' humanity. First John 2:22 says, "Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist-he denies the Father and the Son."

Does this teacher preach the gospel? The gospel is defined as the good news concerning Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). As nice as they sound, the statements "God loves you,"¹¹ "God wants us to feed the hungry," and "God wants you to be wealthy" are not the complete message of the gospel. As Paul warns in Galatians 1:7, "Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ." No one, not even a great preacher, has the right to change the message that God gave us. "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" {Galatians 1:9).

Does this teacher exhibit character qualities that glorify the Lord? Speaking of false teachers, Jude 11 says, "They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. In other words, a false teacher can be known by his pride (Cain's rejection of God's plan), greed (Balaam's prophesying for money), and rebellion (Korah's promotion of himself over Moses). Jesus said to beware of such people and that we would know them by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-20).

For further study, review those books of the Bible that were written specifically to combat false teaching within the church: Galatians, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, and Jude. It is often difficult to spot a false teacher/false prophet. Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), and his ministers masquerade as servants of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:15). Only by being thoroughly familiar with the truth will we be able to recognize a counterfeit.

Finally Why is Sound Doctrine so Important

Answer: Paul charges Titus, "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). Such a mandate makes it obvious that sound doctrine is important. But why is it important? Does it really make a difference what we believe?

Sound doctrine is important because our faith is based on a specific message. The overall teaching of the church contains many elements, but the primary message is explicitly defined: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures [and] ... he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This is the unambiguous good news, and it is "of first importance!" Change that message, and the basis of faith shifts from Christ to something else. Our eternal destiny depends upon hearing "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13; see also 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

Sound doctrine is important because ***the gospel is a sacred trust*** and we dare not tamper with God's communication to the world. Our duty is to deliver the message, not to change it. Jude conveys an urgency in guarding the trust: "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 1:3; see also Philippians 1:27). To "contend" carries the idea of strenuously fighting for something, to give it everything you've got. The Bible includes a warning neither to add to nor subtract from God's Word (Revelation 22:18-19). Rather than alter the apostles' doctrine, we receive what has been passed down to us and keep it "as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13).

Sound doctrine is important because ***what we believe affects what we do***. Behavior is an extension of theology, and there is a direct correlation between what we think and how we act. For example, two people stand on top of a bridge; one believes he can fly, and the other believes he cannot fly. Their next actions will be quite dissimilar. In the same way, a man who believes that there is no such thing as right and wrong will naturally behave differently from a man who believes in well-defined moral standards. In one of the Bible's lists of sins, things like rebellion, murder, lying, and slave trading are mentioned. The list concludes with "whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:9-10). In other words, true teaching promotes righteousness; sin flourishes where "the sound doctrine" is opposed.

Sound doctrine is important because we must ascertain truth in a world of falsehood. "Many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). There are tares among the wheat and wolves among the flock (Matthew 13:25; Acts 20:29). The best way to distinguish truth from falsehood is to know what the truth is.

Sound doctrine is important because ***the end of sound doctrine is life***. "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16). Conversely, the end of unsound doctrine is destruction. "Certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord" (Jude 1:4). Changing God's message of grace is a "godless" thing to do, and the condemnation for such a deed is severe. Preaching another gospel ("which is really no gospel at all") carries an anathema: "let him be eternally condemned!" (see Galatians 1:6-9).

Sound doctrine is important because ***it encourages believers***. A love of God's Word brings "great peace" (Psalm 119:165), and those "who proclaim peace ... who proclaim salvation" are truly "beautiful" (Isaiah 52:7). A pastor "must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9).

The word of wisdom is "Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set" (Proverbs 22:28, NKJV). If we can apply this to sound doctrine, the lesson is that we must preserve it intact. May we never stray from "the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3).