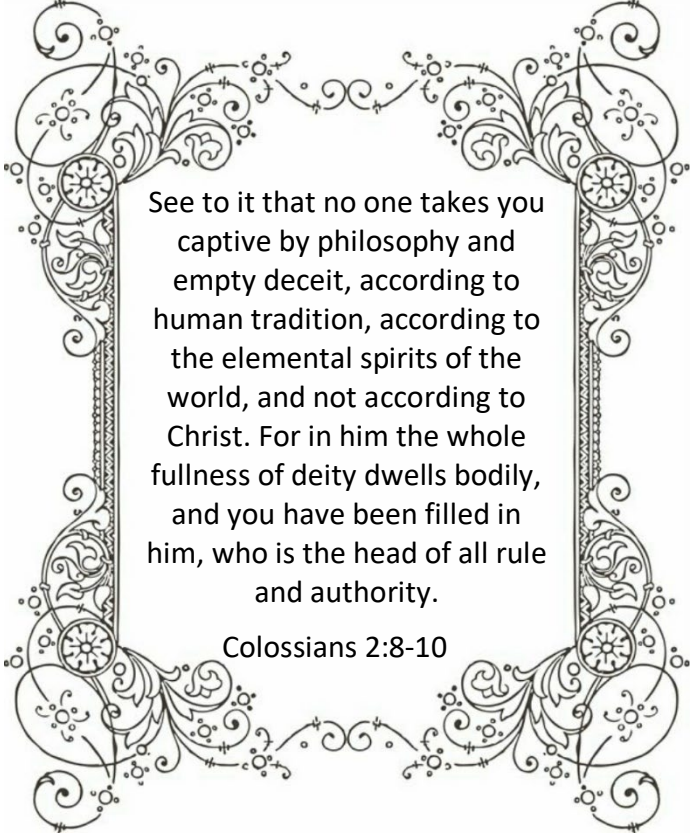


Introduction

*Ravenous Wolves:
From Gnosticism to Narcissism*

DENNIS A. WRIGHT, DMIN

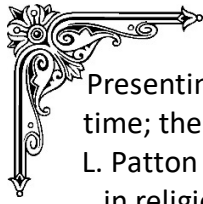
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See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Colossians 2:8-10

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Presenting an issue sharply is indeed by no means a popular business at the present time; there are many who prefer to fight their intellectual battles in what Dr. Francis L. Patton has aptly called a “condition of low visibility.”¹ Clear-cut definition of terms in religious matters, bold facing of the logical implications of religious views, is by many persons regarded as an impious proceeding. . . . But with such persons we cannot possibly bring ourselves to agree. Light may seem at times to be an impertinent intruder, but it is always beneficial in the end. The type of religion which rejoices in the pious sound of traditional phrases, regardless of their meanings, or shrinks from “controversial” matters, will never stand amid the shocks of life. In the sphere of religion, as in other spheres, the things about which men are agreed are apt to be the things that are least worth holding; the really important things are the things about which men will fight.

J. Gresham Machen²



PURPOSE OF RAVENOUS WOLVES: FROM GNOSTICISM TO NARCISSISM



In vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

Matthew 15:9



In the 1970s, British science historian James Burke created *Connections*, a science education television series for the British Broadcasting Company, first airing in 1978 in Great Britain and in 1979 in the United States. Burke took an interdisciplinary approach to the history of science and invention, and demonstrated how various discoveries, scientific achievements, and historical world events were built from one another successively in an interconnected way to bring about particular aspects of modern technology. The series was noted for Burke’s crisp and enthusiastic presentation (and dry humor), historical re-enactments, and intricate working models.

¹ Francis L. Patton, in the introduction to William Hallock Johnson, *The Christian Faith Under Modern Searchlights*, [1916], 7.

² Machen, J. G. (2009). *Christianity and Liberalism* (New Edition). Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1-2.

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The popular success of the series led to the production of *The Day the Universe Changed* (1985), a similar program, but showing a more linear history of several important scientific developments and their more philosophic impact on Western civilization.³

Connections explored an “Alternative View of Change” (the subtitle of the series) that rejected the conventional linear and teleological⁴ view of historical progress. Burke contended that one cannot consider the development of any particular piece of the modern world in isolation. Rather, the entire gestalt⁵ of the modern world is the result of a web of interconnected events, each one consisting of a person or group acting for reasons of their own motivations (e.g., profit, curiosity, religion) with no concept of the final, modern result to which the actions of either them or their contemporaries would lead. The interplay of the results of these isolated events is what drives history and innovation, and was also the main focus of the series and its sequels.

To demonstrate this view, Burke began each episode with a particular event or innovation in the past (usually ancient or medieval times) and traced the path from that event through a series of seemingly unrelated connections to a fundamental and essential aspect of the modern world. For example, the episode “The Long Chain” traced the invention of plastics from the development of the *fluyt*, a type of Dutch cargo ship.

Burke also explored three corollaries to his initial thesis:

1. The first is that, if history is driven by individuals who act only on what they know at the time, and not because of any idea as to where their actions will

³ Years later, the success in syndication led to three sequels. *Connections2* (1994) and *Connections3* (1997) were made for TLC. In November 2023, the six-episode series *Connections with James Burke*, premiered on Curiosity Stream, again with Burke as the on-screen presenter. [“James Burke discusses revival of famous ‘Connections’ docuseries: Exclusive Q&A”](#). *Space.com*. 6 November 2023.

⁴ **Teleology** (from τέλος, *telos*, “end”, “aim”, or “goal”, and λόγος, *logos*, “explanation” or “reason”) or **finality** is a branch of causality giving the reason or an explanation for something as a function of its end, its purpose, or its goal, as opposed to as a function of its cause. James Wood, in his *Nuttall Encyclopaedia*, explained the meaning of *teleology* as “the doctrine of final causes, particularly the argument for the being and character of God from the being and character of His works; that the end reveals His purpose from the beginning, the end being regarded as the thought of God at the beginning, or the universe viewed as the realization of Him and His eternal purpose.” Partridge, Eric (1977). *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*. London: Routledge, 4187. Mahner, Martin; Bunge, Mario (2013-03-14). *Foundations of Biophilosophy*. Springer Science & Business Media.

⁵ **Gestalt psychology**, **gestaltism**, or **configurationism** is a school of psychology and a theory of perception that emphasizes the processing of entire patterns and configurations, and not merely individual components. Gestalt psychology is often associated with the adage, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts”. In Gestalt theory, information is perceived as wholes rather than disparate parts which are then processed summatively.

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eventually lead, then predicting the future course of technological progress is merely conjecture. Therefore, if we are astonished by the connections Burke was able to weave among past events, then we will be equally surprised to what the events of today eventually will lead, especially events of which we were not even aware at the time.

The second and third corollaries were explored most in the introductory and concluding episodes, and they represented the downside of an interconnected history.



2. If history progresses because of the synergistic interaction of past events and innovations, then as history does progress, the number of these events and innovations increases. This increase in possible connections causes the process of innovation to not only continue, but also to accelerate. Burke posed the question of what happens when this rate of innovation, or more importantly “change” itself, becomes too much for the average person to handle, and what this means for individual power, liberty, and privacy.
3. Lastly, if the entire modern world is built from these interconnected innovations, all increasingly maintained and improved by specialists who required years of training to gain their expertise, what chance does the average citizen without this extensive training have in making an informed decision on practical technological issues, such as the building of nuclear power plants or the funding of controversial projects such as stem cell research? Furthermore, if the modern world is increasingly interconnected, what happens when one of those nodes collapses? Does the entire system follow suit?⁶

That being said, my purpose in writing *Ravenous Wolves: From Gnosticism to Narcissism* is to demonstrate how the theological malaise of so many churches today can be traced back through the centuries to Gnosticism, then through Pelagianism, and finally reaching fruition in Narcissism. The history of heresy as it has affected modern Christianity is

⁶ Adapted from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Connections_\(British_TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Connections_(British_TV_series)). Retrieved September 22, 2024.

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therefore a significant study in our efforts to explain what has happened to the Biblical foundation of orthodoxy⁷ and orthopraxy⁸ that is so lacking within the modern church.

⁷ Cairns, A. (2002). "Orthodoxy." In *Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 319-320. Orthodoxy describes the body of doctrines that are essential to the Christian faith. People who hold to this body of truth may disagree on points of interpretation on subjects that do not materially affect the central truths of God's revelation. Differences on such matters do not make men heretics. Any list of the essential Christian doctrines that constitute orthodoxy must include the following:

1. One personal, eternal God who exists necessarily in the Trinity* of His sacred persons.
2. The inspiration and authority of the Bible as the very word of God, the sole source of Christian doctrine. This includes the historical integrity of the Old Testament and the New Testament, including their record of the supernatural interventions of God in the affairs of men.
3. God's creation *ex nihilo* of the heavens and earth and all that is in them, and His providential sovereign control of His entire creation.
4. The Person and work of Christ, with particular emphasis on the following: His essential and eternal deity; His incarnation and virgin birth; His sinlessness and obedience to God in His life; His once-for-all vicarious atonement by the shedding of His blood at Calvary; His actual bodily resurrection* from the dead; His ascension to God's right hand to be the great high priest and advocate* of His people; His second coming.
5. The essential and eternal deity and the Trinitarian personality of the Holy Spirit.
6. The historicity of the biblical narrative of the creation of man, his fall into sin, God's consequent curse of the earth, and the corruption of the entire human race by Adam's fall.
7. Salvation by free grace without any addition of human merit at any stage in the work. This includes the following truths: the depravity of all men by nature and their inability, while unregenerate, to produce spiritual good; the necessity of the Spirit's work to regenerate souls dead in sins and to create repentance and faith in them; the full application to God's people of the redemption purchased by Christ; eternal life as the free gift of God, to be received by faith, not obtained with money or merit; justification by faith alone, including the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness as the ground of the believer's acceptance with God; the union of all believers with Christ as members of His body, the church; sanctification by the power of the Holy Spirit, who works in those whom God has justified to produce good works as the evidence of a living faith; glorification with Christ in the blessed enjoyment of eternal life.
8. The resurrection of saints and sinners, God's judgment of all men, followed by the everlasting blessedness of the saints (heaven) and the everlasting punishment of the lost (hell).

Some may add their own denominational distinctives to the list, but this would be a mistake. Anyone who holds these truths will never go wrong on anything that is essential to the saving of men's souls. All who are within this framework of fundamental truth hold to orthodoxy, despite all their minor variations of views. All who are outside of this framework are heterodox, whatever other points of interpretation they may hold in common with the orthodox.

⁸ *Orthopraxy* is a compound Greek word. The first word in the compound is *ortho*, which means "right, correct, or straight." *Praxis*, the second word of the compound, sounds similar to the English equivalent—*practice*. Orthopraxy or orthopraxis is simply "correct practice" or "correct behavior." One of the main objectives of Scripture is to present you with the right beliefs (orthodoxy), so it can produce in you right actions (orthopraxy), c.f. Joshua 1:7-8.

According to the Bible, correct doctrine will lead to correct behavior, but the doctrine comes first. In Romans, Paul spends the first eleven chapters explaining correct doctrine. In Romans 12:1 he transitions

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Even in church, we worry about world problems we cannot understand or master, and we waste our time and substance on committees whose announced purpose is to save the world and whose real purpose turns out to be getting some politician elected. Even in church, we are so shaky in our faith in the next world that we often talk as if the teachings and promises of our Lord were a mere convenience for putting this world to rights . . .

Well, but mustn't the churches adapt Christianity to suit the ideas of our time? No, they must not. Our ideas are killing us spiritually. When your child swallows poison, you don't sit around thinking of ways to adapt his constitution to a poisonous diet. You give him an emetic.

Joy Davidman (aka Mrs. C. S. Lewis)⁹



Somewhere along the way, the modern church has traded the **Sola Scriptura** of the Reformation for the **Solus Pragmatismus** of Modernity.¹⁰ One must look no further than to Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) to see how sound Biblical teaching gave way to the demonic allure of pragmatism and diversity. More than any other single individual, Finney tossed 1800 years of sound doctrine from Jesus the Messiah, the Apostles, the Church Fathers, and the Reformers into the dustbin of history. When the chickens of today's modern church come home to roost, they will be found in Finney's henhouse!

In the name of compromise, one other individual bears great responsibility for trashing the rich doctrinal heritage of the Baptists, all of whom originated in the English

to correct practice: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." The word *therefore* means that the instructions that follow are based upon the doctrine that has just been explained.

In Ephesians we see the same pattern. Ephesians 1–3 explain correct doctrine, and chapters 4–6 explain correct practice. Once again, Ephesians 4:1 makes the transition: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." In the first 3 chapters, Paul has explained the calling of the Christian in doctrinal terms, and now he calls his readers to live in light of that doctrine. In Titus 3:8 Paul pulls orthodoxy and orthopraxy together in one verse: "The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

⁹ Quoted in Megan Basham (2024). *Shepherds for Sale: How Evangelical Leaders Traded the Truth for a Leftist Agenda*. New York: Broadside Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, xi.

¹⁰ Modernity is the self-definition of a generation about its own technological innovation, governance, and socioeconomics. To participate in modernity was to conceive of one's society as engaging in organizational and knowledge advances that make one's immediate predecessors appear antiquated or, at least, surpassed.

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Reformation in the sixteenth century. Even though he is revered among Southern Baptists, Edgar Y. Mullins (1860-1928)¹¹—in the name of compromise—watered down the Reformed theology which had been cherished by Baptists for nearly 400 years while elevating one’s personal “experience” to a level equal to that of the historic Baptist acceptance of the Doctrines of Grace. To the detriment of the Baptists, it was not so very long before “experience” and “pragmatism” eclipsed—and then surpassed—doctrine.



MASTERING THE MALAISE

This malaise affects not only the theology and belief systems that are being taught by the pastors and teachers in many of the churches of America, it also greatly affects the worldview of those professing Christians within those churches.

Case in point, in a recent interview, actor Dean Cain encouraged Christians in America who don’t vote to get involved in the political process. “There’s up to 40 million Christians in this country who do not vote,” Cain told Crosswalk Headlines. Furthermore, he notes that millions of Christians are not even registered. “... What I would really love to see is, I’d like to see those 40 million Christians who don’t vote in every election vote.”

“Get involved,” Cain said. “You may not be interested in politics, but politics are interested in you.”¹² While personal involvement in politics is anathema to many authentic Christians, such involvement is certainly not the case with those on the political and theological left. In his book, *The Devil and Karl Marx*, political science professor Paul Kengor describes the process the Communist Party USA used between 1920 and 1950 to deliberately infiltrate mainline Protestant churches and woo pastors to their socialist program:

I found repeatedly, dating back a century, beginning with the launch of the Soviet Comintern and Communist Party USA in 1919, atheistic communists clearly tapping social-justice language not because they believed in Jesus (quite the contrary) but to dupe believers in Jesus . . .

Documents in the Soviet Comintern Archives on Communist Party USA show how communist officials in Moscow and New York¹³ deliberately targeted [prominent Methodist seminary professor Harry] Ward to help push their

¹¹ At the time, Mullins was the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

¹² © Crosswalk Headlines, September 9, 2024. Retrieved September 22, 2024.

<https://www.crosswalk.com/headlines/contributors/michael-foust/actor-dean-cain-encourages-the-40-million-christians-in-america-who-dont-vote-to-get-involved.html>

¹³ Kengor, P. (2020). *The Devil and Karl Marx: Communism’s Long March of Death, Deception, and Infiltration*. Gastonia, North Carolina: TAN Books.

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propaganda. In one letter from December 1920, Ward is listed by Comintern officials as a source to get their materials on the shelves at the seminary library.¹⁴

Does this indicate that the theological and ontological issues which permeate so many of our churches have their basis in a political agenda? Not necessarily, although the case can be made that political agendas can have undue influence within local churches — and even within more than one denomination. While the malaise within many modern churches may indeed have political overtones, the real basis is to be found in the spirit world, in the demonic.

One must never ignore the fact that Satan is alive and well on Planet Earth. The Apostle Peter reminds us, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8). And ever since Jesus the Messiah birthed His Church on the Day of Pentecost in AD 30, Satan has been there to oppose it. Those whom Satan has used for the past two millennia fall into two categories: one, those who are false prophets and pretenders; and two, those whom the Church Councils branded as heretics.

Consider Simon the Magician in Acts 8: The name or term “Magus” is not given to him in the New Testament, but is justly used to designate or particularize him on account of the incident recorded in Acts 8:9–24, for though the word “Magus” does not occur, yet in verse 9 (“But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great.”) the present participle *mageúōn* is used, and is translated, both in the King James Version and in the Revised Version “used sorcery.” Simon accordingly was a sorcerer, he “bewitched the people of Samaria” (KJV). In verse 11 it is also said that “of long time he had amazed” them “with his sorceries” (*magíais*). The claim, given out by himself, was that he “was some great one”; and this claim was acknowledged by the Samaritans, for previous to the introduction of the gospel into Samaria, “They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” (verse 10).

“But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great.” (Acts 8:9)

Rutherford asks, “It is not strange to find the gospel brought into direct conflict with magicians, for in the 1st and 2nd centuries there were a multitude of such persons who pretended to possess supernatural powers by which they endeavored to deceive men. They flattered the sinful inclinations of the human heart, and fell in with men’s current

¹⁴ Kengor (2020), 167.

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ways of thinking, and required no self-renunciation at all. For these reasons the magicians found a ready belief on the part of many.”¹⁵

The emperor Tiberius, in his later years, had a host of magicians in constant attendance upon him. Elymas, with whom Paul came in contact in Cyprus “was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence” (Acts 13:7a). Elymas was one of those magicians, and he endeavored to turn away the deputy from the faith. Luke expressly calls this man “μᾶγος (magus),” Elymas the magician (Acts 13:6). The influence of such persons presented an obstacle to the progress of the Christian faith, which had to force its way through the delusions with which these sorcerers had surrounded the hearts of those whom they deceived. When the gospel came in contact with these magicians and with their works, it was necessary that there should be striking facts, works of supernatural power strongly appealing to men’s outward senses, in order to bring them out of the bewilderment and deception in which they were involved, and to make them able to receive the impression of spiritual truth. Such miracles were wrought both in Cyprus and in Samaria, the spheres of influence of the magicians Elymas and Simon. These Divine works first arrested men’s attention, and then dispelled the delusive influence of the sorcerers.¹⁶

9



“What we have here is a failure to communicate.”

Strother Martin
“Cool Hand Luke”



WE NEED A NEW REFORMATION!

R.C. Sproul says, “We need an Augustine or a Luther to speak to us anew lest the light of God’s grace be not only overshadowed but be obliterated in our time.”¹⁷

John Piper adds, “Yes, we do. But we also need tens of thousands of ordinary pastors like you and me, who are ravished with the extraordinary sovereignty of joy in God. And we need to rediscover Augustine’s peculiar slant—a very Biblical slant—on grace as the free

¹⁵ Rutherford, J. (1915). “Simon Magus.” In J. Orr, J. L. Nuelsen, E. Y. Mullins, & M. O. Evans (Eds.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Vols. 1–5). Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 2796. Public Domain.

¹⁶ Rutherford (1915), 2796.

¹⁷ Piper, J. (1998). “The Swan Is Not Silent: Sovereign Joy in the Life and Thought of St. Augustine.” 1998 Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, 14.

gift of sovereign joy in God that frees us from the bondage of sin. We need to rethink our Reformed soteriology so that every limb and every branch in the tree is coursing with the sap of Augustinian delight. We need to make plain that total depravity is not just badness, but blindness to beauty and deadness to joy; and unconditional election means that the completeness of our joy in Jesus was planned for us before we ever existed; and that limited atonement is the assurance that indestructible joy in God is infallibly secured for us by the blood of the covenant; and irresistible grace is the commitment and power of God's love to make sure we don't hold on to suicidal pleasures, but will set us free by the sovereign power of superior delights; and that the perseverance of the saints is the almighty work of God to keep us, through all affliction and suffering, for an inheritance of pleasures at God's right hand forever."¹⁸

WHO IS THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH?

About six months before his crucifixion the Lord Jesus Christ, in a sense, gives a final examination to His disciples after they've been with Him in three years of seminary. The examination has two basic questions: one, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13); and two, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15)

People were saying He was John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah or one of the prophets. And then Jesus really narrowed in the questioning, and He said, "But who do you say that I am?" It was at that time that Simon Peter—who frequently spoke, and who was frequently wrong—spoke up this time and got an A-plus. Simon Peter said, "You're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said, in effect, "Simon, you get an A-plus. Now, don't get puffed up about it. You didn't figure it out. It's not because you're such a good student: 'For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven' (Matthew 16:17). He's the One that showed it to you." Then Jesus said, "I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Adrian Rogers explains, "There are some things I want you to learn about the foundation of the Church of the Lord Jesus. Number one: I want you to see the foundation of the Church. Jesus asked the disciples, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.' " (Matthew 16:15–17)

Scripture plainly reveals that the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be built upon a rock, upon a foundation stone. The question has arisen: Who, or what, is that rock?

¹⁸ Piper (1998), 14.

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Roman Catholics tell us that that rock is Simon Peter—and here's why they say that: because the name *Peter* is "rock." Peter is a form of the Greek word *petros*, which means "rock." Because Jesus said to Peter, "You are a rock, and upon this rock I'll build my Church" (Matthew 16:18) Roman Catholics say, "So, it's clear—as plain as the nose on your face—Jesus called Peter a rock, and then He said, 'I'm going to build my Church upon this rock,' thus the Church is built upon Simon Peter. Simon Peter is the rock upon which the Church is built."

11

Ah, not so! The Church was not built upon Simon Peter. The Church is built upon none other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself! When Jesus called Peter a rock—you don't see this in the English translation, but in the Greek in which this was written—it is very clear that Jesus is making a play on words, and He uses two different words for rock. Now, here's what Jesus said: "You are Peter"; that is, "You are a rock." But the word that Jesus uses here is *petros*, which means a "a little rock or boulder." All right, "Now you are a little rock." But then Jesus said, "Upon this [*petra*]"—*petros* is masculine gender; *petra* is feminine gender—"Upon this [*petra*] I will build my church." There are two different words in the original language: one (*petros*), means "a little rock"; the other (*petra*), means "a foundation stone, a rock ledge." Thus, *petra* means "a bedrock; a great, massive, monolithic rock."

Jesus is saying that "Upon this [Gibraltar] I will build my church." He's making it very clear that, while Peter is a little rock, the Church is not to be built upon such a little rock, but the Church is to be built upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Adrian Rogers said, "I am infinitely glad that I don't have to look back to some ancestral priest or some ancestral apostle as the foundation of the Church. I am so glad that the Church is built upon the Lord Jesus Christ."

Furthermore, Scripture clearly reveals that Peter understood exactly what Jesus was talking about. In 1 Peter 2, Peter calls all Christians "living stones." (1 Peter 2:4) That is, every one of us is a stone. But he calls Jesus the "chief corner stone." (1 Peter 2:6) Peter knew that Christ was the foundation of the Church, the chief cornerstone, and he knew that the rest of us are living stones, little rocks, built upon that foundation stone. And so that is exactly what Jesus was talking about. And it was Paul who told us, "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). Hence, the foundation of the Church is the Lord Jesus. The foundation of the Church is not upon Peter, and neither is it upon Peter's confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), but upon Christ Himself!

Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone! "Therefore the Lord GOD says this, 'Listen carefully, I am laying in Zion a Stone, a tested Stone, A precious Cornerstone for the [secure] foundation,

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firmly placed. He who believes [who trusts in, relies on, and adheres to that Stone] will not be disturbed *or* give way [in sudden panic]’ “ (Isaiah 28:16 AMP).

*The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord.,
She is His new creation
By [Spirit] and the Word.
— Samuel J. Stone¹⁹*

12

WHO IS THE SOVEREIGN?

To suggest that the Church was founded upon anyone—or anything—other than upon the Lord Jesus Christ himself is tantamount to denying the Absolute Sovereignty of Almighty God! This is the error of the Pelagians and their successors the Semi-Pelagians. To this day, it remains the error of the Arminians who are the descendants of these two heretical groups.

Joel Beeke²⁰ lists twelve fatal errors of the Arminian position:

1. It Slanders God's Attributes

It slanders God's attributes, such as his love. Arminianism presents a love that actually doesn't save. It is a love that loves and then, if refused, turns to hatred and anger. It is not unchangeable love that endures from everlasting to everlasting. It provides atonement for all, but then withholds the means of grace that would make that salvation effectual in all lives. Are we to believe that Christ died for everyone in the deepest jungle and the darkest city, but his love doesn't provide the missionaries, preachers, or sermons that would make his death effectual?

2. It Slanders God's Wisdom

Why would God make a plan to save everyone, then not carry it out? Would he be so foolish as to have his Son pay for the salvation of all if he knew that Christ would not be able to obtain what he paid for? Some say he didn't realise the consequences; he saw far enough to provide atonement, but couldn't see that some wouldn't take it. Does not that

¹⁹ Rogers, A. (2017). "The Church Triumphant." In *Adrian Rogers Sermon Archive* (Mt 16:13–19). Rogers Family Trust.

²⁰ Beeke, J. (2009). Adapted from the October 2009 *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*. Note 1 added. © Banner of Truth. Retrieved March 12, 2024.

<https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2009/problems-with-arminian-universal-redemption/>

assertion slander the wisdom of God? Could God plan and provide atonement, but not realize that his atonement would not be accepted?

3. It Slanders God's Power

Arminian universalism obliges us to believe that God was able to accomplish the meriting aspect of salvation, but that the applying aspect is dependent on man and his free will. It asks us to believe that God has worked out everyone's salvation up to a point, but no further for anyone. The implication is that God has built the bridge of salvation between him and us, and we have only to walk over it by accepting his terms of salvation through a free act of the will. "God does his part," Arminians say, "and now we must do our part."

Calvinists respond by saying that this makes salvation dependent on the will of humanity, thereby reducing God and his power. Instead of our coming to God with our withered hands and saying, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make us whole," this view has God coming to us with a withered hand, a hand that is not strong enough to save anyone, and saying, "If thou wilt, thou canst complete this salvation; thou canst make me whole." In essence, modern evangelistic sermons often take such an approach: "God has done much, but he needs you to complete the job." Does that way of thinking not slander the all-sufficient power of God? It makes God dependent on the will of man.

4. It Slanders God's Justice

Did Christ satisfy God's justice for everyone? Did Christ take the punishment due to everybody? If he did, how can God punish anyone? Is it justice to punish one person for the sins of another and later to punish the initial offender again? God can't and won't demand payment twice. Double punishment is injustice.

5. It Disables the Deity of Christ

A defeated Savior is not God. This error teaches that Christ tried to save everyone but didn't succeed. It denies the power and efficacy of Christ's blood, since not all for whom he died are saved. Hence, Christ's blood was wasted on Judas and Esau. Much of his labor, tears, and blood was poured out in vain. In other words, he will not see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied (Isa. 53:11) on behalf of many for whom he died. There will be many miscarriages—those with whom he travailed in soul yet who will not ultimately be saved. Does such defeat not make Christ less than God? No wonder Charles H. Spurgeon called this a "monstrous" doctrine.²¹

²¹ Spurgeon, C.H. (1962). *Autobiography, Volume 1: The Early Years*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 172.

6. It Undermines the Unity of the Trinity

Just as parents must work together to run a family effectively, so the triune God co-labors in each of his persons with identical purposes and goals. One person cannot possibly have in mind to save some that another person has not determined to save, but Arminian universalism implicitly teaches just that. It denies the Father's sovereign election, since Christ would have died for more than God decreed to save, thereby making Christ seem to have a different agenda from that of the Father. That would have been anathema to Jesus, who asserted that his entire redemptive ministry was consciously designed to carry out a divinely arranged plan (John 6:38-39). T.J. Crawford writes,

The atonement originated in the love of God. It is the consequence and not the cause of God's willingness to save sinners. In this light the Savior Himself is careful to present it. Instead of ascribing to His Father all the sternness and severity, and claiming as His own all the tenderness and compassion, He takes special pains to impress us with the assurance that the purpose of His mission was to proclaim the loving message and to execute the loving will of His Father who is in heaven.²²

In the atonement, we are not running from the Father, who as a stern Judge is ready to condemn us, to the Son, who is more gracious than the Father. Rather, in the atonement we have a way to run to the Father and rest in him, for Christ's sake, the way a child runs to and rests in the lap of his or her father.

Then, too, Arminian redemption divides Christ from Christ, as it were. Calvinism insists that Christ's entire priestly work must be viewed as a harmonious whole. His expiation by atoning death and his priestly intercession are co-extensive. What an oxymoron it is to maintain that Christ died for everyone but intercedes only for some (John 17:2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 20, 24).

7. It disavows the saving ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, Arminian redemption disavows the saving ministry of the Holy Spirit, since it claims that Christ's blood has a wider application than does the Spirit's saving work. Any presentation of salvation that makes the Father's or the Spirit's work in salvation lag behind Christ's work contradicts the inherent unity of the Trinity. The Father and the Son are one. The Spirit and the Son are one. Christ cannot possibly have died for those whom the Father did not decree to save and in whom the Spirit does not savingly work. God cannot be at odds with himself. Arminianism is inconsistent universalism.

²² Crawford, J.J. (1954). *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture Respecting the Atonement*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 192.

8. It Rejects All of the Other Points of Calvinism

The Arminian view of the atonement rejects the doctrine of man's total depravity, teaching that man has the ability within himself to receive and accept Christ. It rejects unconditional election, teaching that God elects on the basis of foreseen faith. It rejects irresistible grace, teaching that man's will is stronger than God's. It rejects perseverance of the saints, teaching that man can apostatize from the faith. J.I. Packer says,

It cannot be over-emphasized that we have not seen the full meaning of the cross till we have seen it as the center of the gospel, flanked on the one hand by total inability and unconditional election and on the other by irresistible grace and final preservation.²³

9. It Detracts from the Glory of God

If God does everything in salvation, he gets all the glory. But if God can only do so much and not everything, then the person who completes the bridge gets at least some glory. That is why there is so much emphasis in mass evangelism on the free will of man. The glory of God is not exalted, and neither is the glory of Christ lifted up for providing a perfect and complete salvation. We are told of the free will of man, without which salvation cannot be put into effect. We are told to exercise our free will without being told that this will is in bondage due to our depraved nature. We cannot freely choose God and salvation on our own. We cannot complete the bridge. God completes the bridge, as we are told in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, so that "no flesh should glory in his presence." Universal atonement exalts the will of man and debases the glory of God.

10. It Undermines Thankfulness and Assurance

Why should I thank God for something that I achieved? If the Lord Jesus did no more for me than he did for Judas and the inhabitants of Sodom, why should I thank him rather than myself? And if there are some for whom Christ died who are in hell today, how can I be sure the atonement will atone for me?

11. It Perverts Evangelism

We repeatedly hear today in evangelistic messages: "Christ died for you. What will you do for him?" But do we ever find in the Bible that someone is told personally, "Christ died for you"? Rather, we find the work of Christ explained, followed by a call to

²³ Quoted in John Blanchard (2006), *The Complete Gathered Gold*. Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 35; cf. Ronald Cammenga and Ronald Hanks (2002). *Saved by Grace: A Study of the Five Points of Calvinism*, 2nd ed. Grandville, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 122-123.

everyone: “Repent and believe the gospel.” The message is not “Believe that Christ died for you” or “Believe that you are one of the Elect.” Significantly, it is “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”

12. It Disparages the Intrinsic Efficacy of the Atonement Itself

Arminians teach that Christ’s work induces the Father to accept graciously what Jesus accomplished in the place of a full satisfaction of his justice. It is as if Jesus persuaded his Father to accept something less than justice demanded. That is why Arminius claimed that when God saved sinners, he moved from his throne of justice to his throne of grace. But God does not have two thrones; his throne of justice is his throne of grace (Psa. 85:10). Arminianism forgets that the atonement does not win God’s love but is the provision of his love. In that provision, Christ paid the full price of justice. He did not make a down payment on the debt owed; he paid the full price of sin so that the Father as Judge could justly cancel the debt (Heb. 10:14-18).

Arminianism, then, is ultimately inconsistent universalism, as John Owen showed powerfully in his *A Display of Arminianism*. Owen explains the fallacy of the Arminian view of the divine design of the atonement as follows:

God imposed his wrath due unto, and Christ underwent the pains of hell, for, either all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or some sins of all men. If the last, some sins of all men, then have all men some sins to answer for, and so shall no man be saved. If the second, that is it which we affirm, that Christ in their stead and room suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the world. If the first, why, then, are not all freed from the punishment of all their sins? You will say, “Because of their unbelief; they will not believe.” But this unbelief, is it a sin, or not? If not, why should they be punished for it? If it be, then Christ underwent the punishment due to it, or not. If so, then why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which he died from partaking of the fruit of his death? If he did not, then did he not die for all their sins.²⁴

Throughout the centuries since God covenanted before the foundation of the world to save His Chosen Ones through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, whereby He provided a full, perfect, and sufficient satisfaction for our sins, one aberration of the Gospel has recurrently threatened the truth. It is the view that man must make some contribution himself in securing his salvation. It is not the size of this contribution that is the important factor, but *the necessity of it*. This in a nutshell is the fatal heresy of

²⁴ Owen, J. (1967). *The Works of John Owen*, Volume 10. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 173-174.

Arminianism.²⁵ [Note: Arminianism will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, “The Top Five Heresies,” within the section on Pelagianism.]

EXACTLY WHAT IS HERESY?

Bruce Demarest explains that heresy connotes doctrinal deviation from the fundamental truths taught by Scripture and the orthodox Christian church, and active propagation of the same.²⁶ The primary Koine Greek word *hairesis*, which appears nine times in the New Testament, fundamentally meant a school of thought or sect: so the sect of the Sadducees (Acts 5:17), the Pharisees (15:5; 26:5), the Nazarenes, *i.e.* the Christians (24:5; 28:22). In Acts 24:14, Paul substituted “way” (*hodos*) for “sect” (*hairesis*) when referring to the Christian movement, probably because *hairesis*, even then, possessed a negative connotation. *Hairesis*, secondly, developed the meaning of schism or faction that developed within the church due to a strong party spirit or lack of love (1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20). Paul’s use of the adjective *hairetikos* in Tit. 3:10 suggests that a heretic is a person who is divisive or factious. The shade of meaning that came to predominate in Christian usage is that of false theological doctrine. Thus 2 Pet. 2:1 refers to the “destructive heresies” of certain false teachers who denied the person and work of Christ.

Heresy, then, is any teaching rejected by the Christian community as contrary to Scripture and hence to orthodox doctrine. Most of the teachings that have been declared heretical have to do with either the nature of God or the person of Jesus Christ. The term *heresy* is not generally used to characterize non-Christian belief. That is to say, systems of belief such as atheism or agnosticism, or non-Christian religions such as Buddhism or Islam are not technically heresy. The term *heresy* is generally reserved for any belief that claims to be Christian and scriptural but has been rejected by the church as sub-Christian or anti-scriptural.²⁷

It should be noted that the writings of the Church Fathers contain numerous warnings against heretical teaching. Ignatius (died 98/117) compared heresy with the working of lethal drugs (*Trall.* 6:1–2) and the attacks of wild beasts and rabid dogs (*Eph.* 7:1). Irenaeus

²⁵ Custance, A.C. (1979). “The Leaven of Synergism” in *The Sovereignty of Grace*. Harmony, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 359.

²⁶ Ferguson, S. B., & Packer, J. I. (2000). In *New Dictionary of Theology* (electronic ed.). Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 291. Bibliography: W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1971; London, 1972); J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1977); G. L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics* (London, 1977); K. Rahner, *On Heresy* (New York, 1964); H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations Between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London, 1954).

²⁷ Grenz, S., Guretzki, D., & Nordling, C. F. (1999). *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 58.

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wrote the treatise *Against Heresies* to refute the various Gnostic errors in the 2nd century world. He urged Christians “to avoid every heretical, godless and impious doctrine” (*Against Heresies* III. 6.4). Clement of Alexandria insisted that heresies spring from self-conceit, vanity and the deliberate mishandling of Scripture (*Stromateis* VII.15). Tertullian claimed that “the philosophers are the fathers of the heretics” (*Against Hermogenes* 8). Cyprian added: “Satan invented heresies and schisms with which to overthrow the faith, to corrupt the truth and to divide unity” (*Unity of the Church* 3).



In a sense, the history of the church is the history of heresies. In the 2nd century, Gnosticism and Marcionism perverted the orthodox doctrine of God. Later, various forms of modalism and Arianism corrupted the doctrine of Christ. Apollinarianism, Nestorianism and monophysitism dealt inadequately with the two natures of Christ. At the time of the Reformation, Socinianism denied the Trinity and the efficacy of Christ’s atoning work, as did later Unitarianism. In modern times neo-Protestantism has denied the personality of God, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, and the divine inspiration of the Scriptures.

The early church defended itself against heretical teaching by appealing to “the rule of faith” or “the rule of truth”, which were brief summaries of essential Christian truths. Irenaeus lamented that heretics follow neither Scripture nor the tradition that originates from the apostles and was preserved in the churches through the succession of elders (*Against Heresies* III.2). Tertullian added that “to know nothing in opposition to the rule of faith is to know all things” (*Prescription of Heretics* 7). The fluid “rule of faith” gave way to more precise instruments for refuting heresies and defining faith, namely, credal formulations such as the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Definition of Chalcedon and the Athanasian Creed. From the time of the Reformation, Protestant bodies have distinguished truth from heresy in numerous confessional statements such as the Formula of Concord, the Thirty-nine Articles, and the Westminster Confession.²⁸

Steven Mueller correctly observes that a presentation of Christian doctrine seeks to clearly express the truth of God’s word. We must remember, however, that there are often competing teachings that contradict true Christian doctrine. While we do not want to become obsessed with errors and heresies, it is important to identify and refute major positions that are opposed to true doctrine. From the earliest creeds, Christians have both confessed what they believe and rejected false teachings. St. Paul taught that an overseer (or pastor) “must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9).

²⁸ Ferguson & Packer (2000), 292-293.

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Error or Heresy?

Errors and heresies are both false teaching, but the distinction is important. A heresy is a persistent error relating to a central Christian doctrine. When confronted with biblical evidence, a heretic refuses correction. Heresies undermine the true Christian faith and, for this reason, place one's salvation in jeopardy.

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This is particularly important when we live in an age of religious pluralism. We cannot ignore those who distort God's word and mislead God's people. Sometimes these false teachings will be obvious. For example, we may easily recognize the heresy of someone who denies the deity of Christ. However, theological errors are often more subtle. A cultist knows that Christians will recognize overt denials of biblical doctrine, but a modified or twisted teaching might be harder to detect. For this reason, a faithful discussion of Christian doctrine must recognize and refute major errors. It is easier to avoid errors when we are familiar with common mistakes and heresies. Furthermore, knowledge of these errors may better equip us to communicate the truth to those who do not know it.²⁹

Robert Morey observes that since relativism, like a cancer, has eaten its way through most of modern society, the only "orthodoxy" today is that there is no orthodoxy and the only "heresy" is the belief that there is such a thing as heresy. To use such words as "heresy" is viewed today as a social blunder as well as an intellectual oddity.

In the name of multi-culturalism, everything and anything is tolerated *except* biblical Christianity. The only ones for whom modern humanism has no tolerance are orthodox Christians. As Gordon Clark pointed out:

This twentieth century usually considers a heretic as a hero, a man to be admired, and imitated by all who have the courage to do so. A heresy-hunter, on the other hand, is the most depraved of all scoundrels, much worse than the Mafia, the drug addicts, and the prostitutes.³⁰

One example of this is the Episcopal Bishop John Spong. While willing to tolerate the most outrageous beliefs and conduct from witchcraft to sodomy, he has no toleration

²⁹ Mueller, S. P., ed. (2005). *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess: An Introduction to Doctrinal Theology*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 3:17-18.

³⁰ Gordon H. Clark, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1983), 240.

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whatsoever for orthodox Christianity. In his book, *Born of a Woman: A Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus*, Spong states:

A literalized myth is a doomed myth. Its truth cannot be rescued. Literalism is not even a benign alternative for contemporary Christians. It is, in the modern world, nothing less than an enemy to faith in Jesus Christ.... Literalism is a claim that God's eternal truth has been or can be, captured in the time-limited concepts of human history.... The day has passed for me when, in the name of tolerance to the religious insecurities of others, I will allow my Christ to be defined inside a killing literalism.³¹

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Even though most liberals are not as open about their intolerance as Spong, most of them ridicule Christian fundamentalists at every opportunity. To accept the Bible at face value is labeled “naive” and “ignorant.” To believe that Jesus was God manifested in the flesh is deemed something that only “idiots” would believe.³²

Howard Marshall explains that old heresies and arguments against Christianity have a habit of reappearing long after they have been thought dead. Somebody has commented that most objections to the faith were voiced by Celsus (who was relentlessly answered by Origen). Nevertheless, there is a sufficient appearance of plausibility in some of them to justify their being taken off the shelf, dusted down, and given a makeover. When this happens, they need fresh examination to save a new generation of readers from being taken in by them.

Such is the case with the thesis of the German lexicographer Walter Bauer (1877–1960), who single-handedly read the entire corpus of ancient Greek literature in order to produce his magnificent *Lexicon to the New Testament*. Its worth is entirely independent of the fact that its compiler was in some respects a radical critic who claimed on the basis of his researches into second-century Christianity that there was no common set of “orthodox” beliefs in the various Christian centers but rather a set of disparate theologies, out of which the strongest (associated with Rome) assumed the dominant position and portrayed itself as true, or “orthodox.”³³

This different—and I think quite inaccurate—view was presented by Bauer in his book *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (1934), where he advanced the radical thesis that the Roman church rewrote the history of the early church, making its interpretation

³¹ John Spong, *Born of a Woman* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 11–12.

³² Morey, R. A. (1996). *The Trinity: Evidence and Issues*. Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 37–39.

³³ Marshall, I. H. (2010). “Foreword.” In *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity*. Wheaton: Crossway, 11.

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of primitive Christianity the “orthodox” view and depicting other early Christian teachers as “heretical” and immoral. According to Bauer, forms of Christianity that came to be understood as “heretical” were prior to and more widespread than the so-called “orthodox” teaching. Thus, many Christian movements in the early church commonly viewed as heterodox are said to constitute authentic primitive expressions of the religion of Jesus.

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Marshall continues, at first there were indeed no concepts of orthodoxy and heresy, and this division was late in being consciously developed. Bauer claimed (without much argument) that this situation could be traced back into the New Testament period. His 1934 monograph defending his case had little influence in the English-speaking world until its translation in 1971. Various writers showed it to be flawed in its analysis of the early churches and their theology and mistaken in assuming that the New Testament writers did not know the difference between orthodoxy and heresy. Now it has undergone resuscitation (if not resurrection) largely through the popular writings of Bart Ehrman,³⁴ who brings in the new evidence for many varied forms of early Christianity in Gnostic documents and adds his own contribution by pointing to the many variations in the manuscripts of the New Testament that he sees as evidence of differences in doctrine.³⁵

Canon H. E. W. Turner rejected Bauer’s thesis in his book, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* (1954). While allowing for certain flexibility in early Christian teaching, Turner argues that primitive Christianity universally held to three kinds of ‘fixed elements’:

1. crucial ‘religious facts’, such as the creator God and the divine Christ as the historical redeemer;
2. the centrality of biblical revelation; and

³⁴ Bart Denton Ehrman is an agnostic New Testament scholar focusing on textual criticism of the New Testament, the historical Jesus, and the origins and development of early Christianity. He has written and edited 30 books, including three college textbooks and six *New York Times* bestsellers. He is the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ehrman earned his BA from Wheaton College in 1978. He later earned an MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1981 and a PhD in 1985, where he studied textual criticism of the Bible, development of the New Testament canon and New Testament apocrypha under Bruce Metzger. Ehrman was raised in the Episcopal Church but subsequently turned into a liberal Christian, remaining in the Episcopal Church for 15 years. Later, after struggling with the philosophical problems of evil and suffering, he became an agnostic atheist.

³⁵ Marshall (2010), 11-12.

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3. the creed and the rule of faith. “Christians lived Trinitarianly before the evolution of Nicene orthodoxy” (28).

Most evangelical authorities agree that the data of early church history and theology show that orthodoxy was earlier and more widespread than Bauer allowed. Indeed, the teachings of Jesus and the apostles were summed up at an early date in the “rule of faith” and the writings of the apostolic fathers. The orthodox faith was attacked by heretical opponents (Gnostic sects, Marcion, Arius, *etc.*), but the latter were opposed by the apostles and early church fathers in both the East and West. Evangelical authorities likewise agree that Bauer’s account of the triumph of Roman “orthodoxy” falls short of credibility.

Given the modern bias against timeless, propositional truths and the belief that faith is a matter of lived experience, the notion of heresy has been substantially diluted in non-Evangelical Christianity. For example, Karl Rahner, working from the ethical view of truth as a lived reality, views heresy as the failure to attain authentic existence at the point where God meets a person. Rather than the repudiation of particular doctrines, heresy embraces subjective attitudes, such as spiritual indifference and a critical spirit. Primary responsibility for this “latent heresy” lies with the individual Christian rather than the magisterium. Yet the New Testament expresses serious concern for “false doctrines” (1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3) and places the highest priority on maintaining “the pattern of sound teaching” (2 Tim. 1:13; *cf.* 1 Tim. 6:3). Scripture urges Christians to be alert to doctrinal deception (Mt. 24:4) and to avoid heresy by carefully guarding the pure content of the gospel (1 Cor. 11:2; Gal. 1:8).³⁶

THE LONG TRADITION OF HERESY

Traditionally, heresy has been defined as any teaching that claims to be Christian yet contradicts orthodox belief. Many of the newer cults make no claim to be Christian, so the term *heresy* would not fit. However, when alien beliefs outside the church influence people inside the church, heresy can result. For example, gnosticism outside the early church led to gnostic heresies within.

Catholic theologian Karl Rahner has postulated—incorrectly, I might add—that a neat boundary between heresy within the church and “other religions” outside is impossible. Nearly all philosophies and religions worldwide have been touched by Christianity and in some way react to it. At the same time, Rahner suggests that modern Christians live in a world of such incomprehensible amounts of secularized information that they can never claim to have thought through all of life from a Christian point of view. (This

³⁶ Ferguson & Packer (2000), 292-293.

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concept is ridiculous because the same could be said of any Christian living at any point during the past 2,000 years!) Furthermore, Rahner carries it much too far, claiming not only that a Christian might be heretical without knowing it, but that a pagan might be Christian without realizing it. This claim is absolutely ridiculous!

However, in the post-Christian world in which currently live, Christian and alien beliefs do sometimes interpenetrate. To spot heresy within the church often requires an awareness of the same error in our society. For example, if the so-called health-and-wealth gospel is heretical (and it is), its error is closely linked to the materialist beliefs of a largely secular society.

This link between non-Christian belief and Christian heresy is clearly seen in the Bible. In both testaments, believers encountered other religions as a threat that could infiltrate the community of faith. The law of Deuteronomy 13 attests to this, as it regulates how believers should respond to syncretists: “If your very own brother ... or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and worship other gods’ (gods that neither you nor your fathers have known, gods of the people around you ...), do not yield to him or listen to him” (vv. 6–8 NIV).

The New Testament picture was similar. Greco-Roman society was rife with religion; as the gospel spread, it met scores of competitors. Paul battled protognosticism, mystery religions, and legalistic varieties of Judaism as they crept into the church. He excoriated “other gospels” (Galatians 1:9) and told Timothy his priority in the church at Ephesus was to command certain men to stop teaching false doctrines (1 Timothy 1:3).

Gordon Lewis of Denver Seminary points out that Titus 1:9 includes a qualification for church leadership that is now neglected: the leader must be able to “encourage others by sound doctrine and *refute those who oppose it*.” Second John 1:9 says flatly, “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God.” The epistle goes on to instruct believers not to welcome bogus teachers into their homes.

Such concerns were not confined to the beginning of the church. In its first centuries, the church was fiercely concerned with combating error and defining doctrine. It was an era of true religious pluralism. It was also an era for creeds and heresy trials.³⁷

³⁷ Stafford, T. (1991). “The Kingdom of the Cult Watchers: With the Advent of the New Age Movement, Cult-Watching Groups Must Aim at Far More Diffuse and Diverse Targets.” *Christianity Today*, 35(11), 19–20. Expanded and analyzed.

WARNINGS AGAINST HERESY



Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.

2 Timothy 2:14



Certainly, there are heretical beliefs that should be definitely condemned, but Christians are warned against arguing among themselves about insignificant matters even in the Christian faith and losing sight of the important truths and duties. Christians can become angry with other Christians and spend time fighting one another rather than Satan himself.

Timothy was to strive to make himself a good servant, meriting the approval of his Master, knowing well the truths of his word. In that way he could combat the false teachings of the heretics.

Two of the heretics are mentioned by name, Hymenaeus and Philetus. Philetus is not mentioned again. Hymenaeus, though, was mentioned also in 1 Timothy 1:20 along with another heretic, Alexander; these two had been given over to Satan, or excommunicated, by Paul at that time. Their heresy was: “holding that the resurrection is past already” (2:18). This heresy was striking at the Christian hope of the final resurrection which would introduce all believers into God’s eternal heaven. The heretics were denying the reality of that and redefining it as something which had already happened, possibly the experience that came to the Christian after accepting Christ. This taking away of the blessed hope was weakening the faith of those who followed the teaching of these heretics.

In various ways Paul urges Timothy to prove himself a true servant of God, one who is known by God and one who lives by the truths of God’s word. He should avoid the evil thoughts that so often come to young men, and also the temptation to quarrel. Rather he should be gentle, patient, and humble as he seeks to help his people avoid the traps of Satan.

Second Timothy 3:1–9 gives Paul’s strongest condemnation of the heretics in the church. They attend church, but they do not believe the Christian truths. They do not live Christian lives themselves, and strive to get others to follow their evil beliefs and practices; Paul likened the heretics of his day to the Egyptian magicians in Exodus 7, who

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were given the names by Jewish tradition, Jannes and Jambres. The modern heretics will fail in their attacks against the truth just as Jannes and Jambres failed in their attacks against God and his spokesman, Moses.

Paul contrasts his own life and beliefs with those of the heretics. He had been persecuted by heretics himself even on his first missionary journey, but he had continued to preach the truth and had brought many to accept Christ. Timothy should follow Paul's example.

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The supreme way to overcome heresy is the diligent study of the Word of God. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (3:16–17).

Paul gives Timothy a solemn charge to preach that word faithfully and diligently. Many will not be willing to listen to the truths of the Bible, but Timothy should try to correct and rebuke them, even though it may bring persecution upon himself.³⁸

WHO THEN IS A HERETIC?

In order to correctly answer this question, we must first clearly establish exactly what makes a person a Christian.

Roger E. Olson³⁹ says that "a Christian is a person who affirms basic Christian beliefs—otherwise known as orthodoxy." While this statement rings true, there is much more that needs to be added. Olson then comments that this definition "may sound exclusive and intolerant to many readers. To be sure, there are other legitimate definitions of *Christian*." He then suggests the following:

1. A Christian is a Christ-follower. (But here again much more needs to be known.)

³⁸ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). "Timothy, Second Letter To." In *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2:2068–2069.

³⁹ Since 1999, Roger E. Olson, PhD, has been holder of the Foy Valentine Professor of Christian Theology of Ethics at George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University, Waco, Texas. Olson identifies himself as a classical Arminian, and is known for his stance in favor of Arminianism. He has written several books including *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (2006) in which he defined and defended his vision of Arminianism. Olson fundamentally defines Arminianism by God's "limited" mode of providence and by God's "predestination by foreknowledge" mode of election. In endorsing these views he is clearly in error.

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2. A Christian is a member of a Christian church. (Yet one can be a member of a church and still be unregenerate.)
3. A Christian is a person transformed by the Spirit of God into a living witness to Jesus Christ and his gospel. (True, but incomplete.)
4. A Christian is someone baptized in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit who continues to claim and affirm that baptism. (Baptism does not save anyone.)⁴⁰

WHO THEN IS A CHRISTIAN?

To truly understand what makes a person an authentic Christian, one must look no farther than the Five Solas of the Reformation, which state that Christians are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as revealed by Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.

SOLA GRATIA “Grace Alone”

Salvation from the judgment and condemnation of God that every human being deserves (because we are sinners) is a gift of grace from God. It has nothing to do with human merit.

Romans 3:10-12

*as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands;
no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good, not even one.”*

God Himself, through His Son Jesus Christ’s death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, rescues all who believe in Him from His wrath. God brings people to repentance and faith in Christ because of His goodness and grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it
is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

SOLA FIDE “Faith Alone”

⁴⁰ Olson, R.E. (2016). *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Second Edition). IVP Academic, 39-40.

Ravenous Wolves: From Gnosticism to Narcissism

The biblical truth that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone is what sets Christianity apart from all other religions in the world. It is not by the believer's works or efforts but by Christ's work on the cross that a person is saved.

Romans 4:4-5

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

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Christ, who lived a perfect, sinless life, willingly bore the full punishment of the wrath of God against believers. He paid the penalty in full. Therefore, those whom God brings to faith in Christ are saved because He imputes Christ's righteousness to them.

Romans 5:8-9

But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.

SOLUS CHRISTUS "Christ Alone"



We urgently need to hear *solus Christus* in our day of pluralistic theology. Many people today question the belief that salvation is only by faith in Christ. As Carl Braaten says, they "are returning to a form of the old bankrupt nineteenth-century Christological approach of Protestant liberalism and calling it 'new,' when it is actually scarcely more than a shallow Jesusology." The end result is that today, many people—as H.R. Niebuhr famously said of liberalism—proclaim and worship "a God without wrath who brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."

Joel R. Beeke⁴¹



John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

⁴¹ Beeke, J.R. *Tabletalk Magazine*. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/christ-alone/>

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Salvation is found in Christ alone. No human being can forgive sins. It is Christ alone who saves.

Romans 10:9

Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

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Acts 4:12

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

SOLA SCRIPTURA “Scripture Alone”

2 Peter 1:21

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible—all 66 books—is the sole authority for Christians in faith, doctrine, and practice. Sola Scriptura acknowledges the facts that the Bible is the Word of God, inerrant, sufficient, without error, and the source of all truth.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

SOLI DEO GLORIA “To the Glory of God Alone”

Titus 3:4-5

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Salvation is wholly a work of God for His glory. Believers contribute nothing to their salvation. Because Christ is both Lord and Savior of believers, they are commanded to live their lives to glorify God.

John 6:44

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"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."

It is God who, through His grace, moves in the sinner's heart, enabling him or her to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Thus, the commitment to Jesus the Messiah that a person must make is a result of all that God has done in that person's heart, and not an effort one must make in order to "do our part" in the salvation process. A person who is spiritually dead can not do anything, period! That person must be made spiritually alive by the sovereign will of God acting through the power of the Holy Spirit. This act of regeneration causes the person to pass from death into life. It is all of Grace!

1 Corinthians 10:31

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

WHAT IS ORTHODOXY?

Orthodoxy simply means "right belief" or "doctrinal correctness." In ancient Christianity the term *orthodoxy*, which means "right or correct opinion" (*doxa orthē*), connotes Christian doctrine and life in conformity with the original truth about Jesus of Nazareth and His teachings. It is therefore opposed to heterodoxy, whose error it shows up, in the synonymous sense of *pseudodoxy* ("false opinion"). In this development there is a departure from the classical philosophical meaning of *heterodox* (having different opinions), as opposed to those who are of the same opinion (*homodoxoi*).

The Pastoral Epistles speak of heterodox teaching (1 Timothy 1:3 and 6:3), and 2nd Century authors speak of heterodox doctrines (Ign., *Magn.* 8,1; *Smyrn.* 6,2) and heterodox teachers (Polyc., 3). Just as the term *heresy*, from its original meaning of "choice," acquired a pejorative sense, so too did heterodoxy, though this was perhaps a parallel phenomenon, and only later did the two terms come to be identified as synonyms of deviation from Christian doctrine and discipline.

This fusion is clear in Eusebius, where the quartodeciman churches, excommunicated by Pope Victor, are called "heterodox" (*HE* 5,24,9)⁴², and false teachers in the church *heterodidaskaloi* (*HE* 3,28,8; 7,7,4). These are opposed not to *homodoxia* but to *orthodoxia*,

⁴² *HE*: Bede (AD 731). *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. The Ecclesiastical History of the English People, written by Bede in about AD 731, is a history of the Christian Churches in England, and of England generally; its main focus is on the conflict between the pre-Schism Roman Rite and Celtic Christianity. It was composed in Latin, and is believed to have been completed in 731 when Bede was approximately 59 years old. It is considered one of the most important original references on Anglo-Saxon history, and has played a key role in the development of an English national identity.

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while orthodox teachers, like Irenaeus and Clement, are called “ambassadors of the church’s orthodoxy” (*HE* 3,23,2), in whom there are no heresies (Athan., *C. Arian.* 2,42–43). The affirmation of orthodoxy involves the same set of problems as the dialectic orthodoxy-heresy.⁴³

However, many people shudder at the sound of *orthodoxy* because it wrongly connotes to them religious fundamentalism. To others it is a negative concept because it conveys the idea of a static worship and spirituality with no life and no contemporary expression. Perhaps both reactions are subconsciously adding *dead* to *orthodoxy* and thinking of all orthodoxy as “dead orthodoxy.” But what if we retrieved and brushed off and refurbished the concept whether we use the word or not? (What other word could we use?) Orthodoxy is really—in the broadest and most generous sense—“mere Christianity.” It is that core of essential beliefs denial of which results in serious distortion of the Christian message of the gospel and Christian mission such that Christianity becomes unrecognizable.⁴⁴ Such distortion of orthodox Christianity is the foundation of heresy, resulting in those who follow such distortions coming to be known as “heretics.”

On a somewhat lighter note, Justo and Catherine González in their book, *Heretics for Armchair Theologians*, explain that “in German, the words for ‘heretic’ and ‘candle’ are rather similar. A colleague of ours studying in Basel discovered this, much to his embarrassment, when he went into a store intending to buy four candles but instead ordered “four heretics.” The storekeeper, wishing to be helpful, asked, “What do you want them for?” to which our friend enthusiastically responded, “To burn for Advent”!⁴⁵

Olson continues, *heresy* is the counterpart to *orthodoxy*. A heresy is a belief (usually when it is taught) that contradicts orthodoxy significantly. For example, a heresy within a Lutheran context is a belief taught by someone claiming to be Lutheran that is significantly contrary to essential Lutheran beliefs and teachings (Lutheran orthodoxy). For example, most Lutherans have always considered and Lutheran doctrinal confessions declare that Christ’s risen and glorified human body is “in, with and under” the elements of bread and wine in faithful celebration of the Lord’s Supper. This view of “real presence” in the sacrament is sometimes known as consubstantiation to distinguish it from the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. A Lutheran who taught either transubstantiation (that the elements of bread and wine cease to be those and become wholly body and blood) or that Christ’s presence is entirely nonbodily and only indirect

⁴³ Grossi, V. (2014). “Orthodoxy.” In A. Di Berardino & J. Hoover (Eds.), & J.T. Papa, E.A. Koenke, & E.E. Hewett (Trans.), *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*. IVP Academic; InterVarsity Press, 2:989.

⁴⁴ Olson (2016). *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity*, 40.

⁴⁵ González, J. L., & González, C. G. (2008). *Heretics for Armchair Theologians* (First edition). Westminster John Knox Press, 1.

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through the Holy Spirit or that the Lord's Supper is only symbolic would be teaching heresy within a Lutheran context. What may be done about that varies from one Lutheran context to another. *Heresy* does not necessarily imply loss of salvation or an inquisition or excommunication. A heretic is not necessarily a bad person; he or she is simply one who *teaches* what is known to be a heresy within his or her tradition-community. There really is no such thing as an "accidental heretic."⁴⁶

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Because many heretics were indeed burned at the stake, it is no great surprise that the very word "heretic" immediately conjures up such events in one's mind. Thomas Taylor defines a heretic as "one who professes Christ yet invents or maintains any errors against the foundation of religion, and that with obstinacy."⁴⁷ Titus issues a warning concerning heretics: "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned." (Titus 3:10-11).

Paul turned his attention to the case of "a person who stirs up division." John Phillips explains that the word translated "division [heretic]" is *hairetikos*, which occurs only here in the New Testament. The root of this word conveys the idea of choice or a deliberately chosen opinion. A heretic is a person who rejects sound biblical doctrine to espouse other ideas. Such self-willed opinions lead to factions and divisions in the church. Paul, Peter, and John were acquainted with heretics. Some of them denied the Resurrection (2 Timothy 2:17-18), others denied the Lord (2 Peter 2:1), and still others were even described as belonging to "the synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9). Church history contains the records of many such men and tells of the incalculable damage they have done. The damage continues because many heretics are in the world today.⁴⁸

The image of a heretic in our liberally minded society is someone who is persecuted, tortured, tried, and probably burned for his or her ideas. In other contexts, and from the opposite perspective, "heretic" is practically an insult, meaning one who delights in falsifying doctrine and leading people astray.⁴⁹

The phrase "after warning him once and then twice" refers to the two examinations to be given to a heretic. The word translated "admonition" is *nouthesia*. It has to do with training by word. A person whose mind has been captured by false teaching must be confronted with the truth of God. Just as a builder uses a plumb line and a level to

⁴⁶ Olson (2016). *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity*, 41.

⁴⁷ Gatiss, L., Green, B. G., & George, T., eds. (2019). *1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon: New Testament: Vol. XII*. IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 301.

⁴⁸ Phillips, J. (2009). *Exploring the Pastoral Epistles: An Expository Commentary* (Titus 3:10a). Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp.

⁴⁹ González & González (2008). *Heretics for Armchair Theologians*, 1-2.

determine whether a wall is true, the elders of the church must bring the straightedge of God's Word to bear upon the heretical opinions and techniques of a brother who is wrapped in his own perverse, divisive ideas. The elders are to confront him twice while he is still in the church. He is to be given every opportunity to recognize his error and recant his heretical opinions.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the truth about heretics is quite complex. The vast majority of heretics were not burned or killed in any other way for his teachings. At worst, some were deposed from positions of importance in the church, and a number were forced to abandon the areas where they had the most followers and influence. Nor were these heretics unbelievers or people seeking to destroy the faith. On the contrary, most—probably all—of them were sincere people trying to understand the Christian faith in their own context, asking important questions from the perspective of faith and seeking to lead others to what they took to be a fuller understanding of the gospel. Finally, even though they and their doctrines were eventually excluded from the mainstream of Christian tradition, they did make an important and lasting contribution to that tradition. This is largely due to the early heretics, and to the response of the church at large, that we have such cherished treasures as the Apostles' Creed and even the New Testament!⁵¹

REFUTATION OF THE UNORTHODOX

The ancient pagans of Roman society were not the only opponents against which Tertullian⁵² directed his considerable rhetorical firepower. He also took on the heretics in many of his apologetic works. Unlike the pagans, the heretics claimed to represent a form of Christianity. But these troublemakers were unorthodox; they held doctrines not taught by the original apostles, nor found in the Holy Scriptures, nor in line with the creeds of the church, nor approved by the respectable bishops. To exclude the false teachers from claiming true doctrine, Tertullian wrote *Prescription against Heretics*.

To understand this work, we must comprehend what is meant by the term *praescriptio*. It was a Roman legal term, derived specifically from the field of real estate law. The

⁵⁰ Phillips (2009). *Exploring the Pastoral Epistles: An Expository Commentary* (Titus 3:10b).

⁵¹ González, J. L., & González, C. G. (2008). *Heretics for Armchair Theologians* (First edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2.

⁵² Tertullian (Latin: *Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus*; c. AD 155 – c. 220) was a prolific early Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa. He was an early Christian apologist and a polemicist against heresy, including contemporary Christian Gnosticism. Tertullian was the first theologian to write in Latin, and so has been called “the father of Latin Christianity,” as well as “the founder of Western theology.” He is perhaps most famous for being the first writer in Latin known to use the term *trinity*.

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praescriptio longi temporis refers to ownership of property by right of longtime possession. When a plot of land has been held by a possessor for a substantial time, a newcomer cannot come along and litigate about the property. Even if he has a deed to show, he has never exercised his right of ownership, so he has lost his claim to the land. Another party has been there for too long, so the newcomer is prevented from disputing about it. He is barred from the court at the outset. The parcel of land belongs to another and has for many years. Case dismissed.

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In a brilliant piece of argumentation, Tertullian applies this legal premise to the heretics. The “property” under dispute is the Bible; and Tertullian is saying with a wave of his hand, “Get off my land, you interlopers.” He knows he could defeat the heretics in a head-to-head exegetical debate. Elsewhere he engages them in arguments about the Bible, not least in his massive five-volume work *Against Marcion*, which refutes that apostate teacher verse by verse. But here he is using the shortcut of the *praescriptio* to rule the heretics out of court before they can even start making arguments. Tertullian aims to show that only the true church traces back to the apostles, having held the biblical writings in its possession from the beginning. In other words, Tertullian is appealing to long-standing Christian tradition against newfangled heretical ideas that have cropped up more recently.

To prove that his church holds the apostolic faith, while heretics invent novelties and run after imaginative speculations, Tertullian appeals to what is known as the rule of faith. In the ancient church, the rule of faith was a brief summary of doctrine taught to candidates for baptism. Since most early Christians were illiterate, they were asked to memorize short creeds and recite them back to the bishop in the water. Prior to baptism, skilled teachers instructed the candidates about the meaning of these sacred words. Today’s Apostles’ Creed was not written by the apostles but comes from the early Middle Ages; yet it is a direct descendant of the second-Century rule of faith that the ancient church fathers knew.

Tertullian used the baptismal rule as a convenient summary of the original apostolic faith, the faith he still held in good standing. In contrast, the heretics had clearly diverged from it. “We Christians are forbidden to introduce anything on our own authority or to choose what someone else introduces on his own authority,” Tertullian writes. “Our authorities are the Lord’s apostles.... They faithfully passed on to the nations the teaching which they had received from Christ.”⁵³ By continuous possession from the beginning, the true church owns the Bible and its unchanged message. The church only interprets the Bible according to the accepted ideas found in creedal summaries. This prevents heretics such

⁵³ Tertullian, *Praescr.* 6 in S. L. Greenslade (1956). *Early Latin Theology*. Louisville: Westminster, 34.

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as the Gnostics from barging in later with crazy myths that have nothing to do with the original teaching of Jesus and his disciples. The job of the Christian is to believe what has already been settled, not to invent new ideas that the church has never heard before.⁵⁴ “To know nothing against the Rule is to know everything.”⁵⁵

It is in the context of rejecting the philosophical speculations of heretics that Tertullian lets loose one of his most widely quoted quips: “What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic?”⁵⁶ This rhetorical outburst has often been taken to show that Tertullian rejected the use of philosophy in defense of Christianity—a mistaken idea at best. Yet the famous slogan does show that Tertullian had little patience for pseudointellectual musings from so-called Christians. If a doctrine is not found in the Bible as viewed through the lens of historic orthodoxy, the person advocating this false teaching must be branded a heretic. Theoretically, the principle of the *praescriptio* would exclude such interlopers from exegetical debate. Yet Tertullian certainly did engage the heretics on scriptural grounds, even if he should not have had to. He was a master of biblical interpretation against heterodox ideas.⁵⁷

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Make them believe, that offensive operations, often times, is the surest, if not the only (in some cases) means of defense.

George Washington⁵⁸

1799



At this juncture, it is important to point out that one does not have to be a gifted theologian like Tertullian in order to be an effective witness regarding the historic Christian faith. These orthodox doctrines are clearly communicated in the pages of Holy

⁵⁴ This does not mean Tertullian rejected good theological debate among Christians. Nevertheless, orthodoxy provides the boundaries for Christian discussions. There are certain doctrinal essentials that cannot be disputed. He writes, “Provided the essence of the Rule is not disturbed, you may seek and discuss as much as you like” (Ibid., 14; Greenslade, 40).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 7 (Greenslade, 36). Here, the “Academy” refers to the school of Plato.

⁵⁷ Litfin, B. M. (2020). “Tertullian of Carthage: African Apologetics Enters the Fray.” In B. K. Forrest, J. D. Chatraw, & A. E. McGrath (Eds.), *The History of Apologetics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 92-94.

⁵⁸ “**The best defense is a good offense**” is an adage that has been applied to many fields of endeavor, including games and military combat. It is also known as the strategic offensive principle of war. Generally, the idea is that proactivity (a strong offensive action) instead of a passive attitude will preoccupy the opposition and ultimately hinder its ability to mount an opposing counterattack, leading to a strategic advantage.

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Scripture. Jesus explained, “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

Obviously, Jesus is telling us to become so familiar with sound doctrine (orthodoxy) and sound practice (orthopraxy) that when we hear the malignant moronic mutterings of a multitude of misguided men—and women—(minions of Mephistopheles) who elevate themselves by claiming to be modern day apostles and prophets proclaiming a “new word from God,” we can immediately discern truth from error.

This brings us back to the real purpose of this book which you hold in your hand: To know the Truth and to be set free to the Glory of God! To paraphrase Washington, “The best defense is a good offense!”

SEVEN SIGNIFICANT SUMMARY STATEMENTS

1. **Theological Decline in Modern Churches:** The author argues that many modern churches have shifted from the foundational principles of Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone) to a pragmatic approach, leading to theological compromise and a departure from historic orthodoxy.
2. **Historical Roots of Heresy:** Heresies such as Gnosticism, Pelagianism, and Narcissism have historically infiltrated the church, distorting core Christian doctrines. The author emphasizes the importance of understanding these heresies to safeguard the faith.
3. **Orthodoxy vs. Heresy:** Orthodoxy is defined as “right belief” based on the Five Solas of the Reformation, while heresy is any teaching that deviates from these foundational truths. Heresy undermines the gospel and places salvation at risk.
4. **The Role of Scripture:** The Bible is upheld as the sole authority for faith and practice. Correct doctrine (orthodoxy) leads to correct behavior (orthopraxy), and Christians are called to diligently study Scripture to discern truth from error.
5. **The Foundation of the Church:** The document asserts that the church is built on Jesus Christ, not on individuals like Peter or their confessions. Jesus the Christ is the chief cornerstone, and all believers are “living stones” built upon Him.
6. **The Danger of Pragmatism and Modernity:** The author critiques the influence of modernity and pragmatism in the church, which prioritize human experience and societal trends over biblical truth, leading to spiritual malaise.

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7. **The Need for a New Reformation:** The author calls for a return to the foundational truths of the Christian faith, emphasizing the sovereignty of God, the sufficiency of Christ's atonement, and the authority of Scripture to combat theological drift and heresy.



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