

Jude 17-19

17 But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, **18** that they were saying to you, “In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.” **19** These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. **20** But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, **21** keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. **22** And have mercy on some, who are doubting; **23** save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

Kim Riddlebarger on Jude 17ff...Overview

“In the third and final portion of Jude (vv. 17-25), Jude makes three points of application. The first is an exhortation to all those reading and hearing this letter to remember the predictions made by the apostles—the situation in which the Christians of Jude’s day now find themselves (dealing with false teachers) is something of which the Apostles had specifically warned.

The second point Jude makes is that until the day of judgment, God’s people should devote themselves to dwelling in God’s love, so that the acrimony and doctrinal debate which is taking place in the churches (as necessary as it is) does not cause God’s people to become cold or hard-hearted toward one another. Allowing the church to become a place of bitterness and contention would be as bad as allowing the false teachers to go unchecked. To ensure that this is not the case, Christians are to build themselves up in the faith, they are to pray in the Spirit, and they are to wait eagerly for the Lord’s return.

Third, Jude explains how Christians are to treat those who have been deceived by false prophets and false preachers. Christians are to exercise great mercy toward them, while at the same time exercising great caution that they themselves do not fall into the same kind of errors as those who have been deceived.

A change of focus...as Jude transitions to our responsibilities in view of encroaching apostasy

The apostates...Jude 8,10,11,12,14,16 (these, these men, etc.)

Jude 17...But you

“These” in Jude 19...but reverts to “but you” in Jude 20

An ominous reminder to the early Church...False teachers within the visible Church

Matthew 16:18...8 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it

The “visible” and “invisible” Church

“What do we mean when we make the distinction between the visible and invisible church? And what is the reason for this distinction? Starting around the 4th century - the expression "Visible Church" was referred to by theologians, not to a building, but to the members on the rolls of a local church. In other words, all persons who are members of a local church are considered to be a part of the **visible church**.

On the other hand, **the invisible church** refers to those persons who have actually been regenerated or quickened by the Holy Spirit, God's elect or true believers. Augustine referred to the church as a mixed body, a visible people, but this people has both tares and wheat, as described by Jesus. In other words, there is no such thing as a perfect church, and there will always be people in the church there with bad motives or are there for the wrong reason. There will always be people who claim to love Christ but whose heart is far from Him. Many, Jesus says, will say on that day, did we not do this and that in your name? Jesus will then say, "I never knew you". These are descriptions of some people now sitting in your local church and Jesus says of them that he "never knew them!" Some persons are in church for show, to be seen by men as pious, others perhaps for a social club or to show off their ability to wax eloquent when discussing theology. These persons' hearts are completely invisible to us, but of course, they are not invisible to God and only He can know who is truly regenerate, so we must be generous in our judgements.

http://www.reformationtheology.com/2006/05/the_visible_vs_the_invisible_c.php

Danger in the Church mid-First Century

Galatians 1:6f...6 I am amazed that you are *so quickly deserting* Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for *a different gospel; 7 which is really not another*; only *there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ*. **8** But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should

preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, **he is to be accursed!** **9** As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, **he is to be accursed!**

Galatians 2:3...Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. **2** It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but *I did so* in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. **3** But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. **4** But *it was* because of the **false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty** which we have in Christ Jesus, **in order to bring us into bondage.**

Ephesians 4:14...**14** As a result, we are **no longer** to be children, **tossed here and there by waves** and **carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;**

Colossians 2:8...**8** See to it that no one takes you **captive** through **philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men,** according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

**The state of the Church at the end of the First Century...Revelation 2,3
(5 of 7 churches in poor condition spiritually)**

Remember... “**remember** the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ”

2 Peter 3:2...This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind **by way of reminder, 2 that you should remember** the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior *spoken* by your apostles

In the last time...

Acts 20:29...**28 Be on guard** for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. **29** I know that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert,**

remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Mockers...

The object of the “mockers” mocking seems to be the revealed will of God (cf. Ps. 35:16; Prov. 14:6; 19:25; et al.). These workers were . . . ever intent on experiencing the thrills of new forms of ungodliness.

Tom Constable Notes

2 Peter 3:3...3 Know this first of all, that *in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts*, **4** and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” **5** For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth was formed out of water and by water, **6** through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. **7** But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

Following after their own ungodly lusts...

Jude 4,7,8,13

1 Peter 2:10...9 *then* the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, **10** and especially *those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority*.

Cause divisions...only use of this Greek term in the NT...”to make a distinction”

The false teachers’ teaching divided the believers into two basic groups: those who remained in the apostles’ teaching and those who departed from it

Tom Constable Notes

An attitude and disposition of superiority...with special revelation and an elevated “spirituality”, scoffing at those who don’t seem to understand their unique understanding (“I used to view that passage as you do until I came to understand what the Greek really means”)

Perhaps akin to Diotrophes (3 John 9) who loved to have the preeminence

Worldly minded...

Jude 10...10 But *these men revile the things which they do not understand*; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.

1 Corinthians 2:14...14 *But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.*

Devoid of the Spirit...

Romans 8:9...6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, **7** because *the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God*; for *it does not subject itself to the law of God*, for *it is not even able to do so*, **8** and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. **9** However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. *But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*

Forewarned is forearmed

Matthew 7:15ff...15 *“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits.* Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? **17** So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. **18** A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. **19** Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** So then, you will know them by their fruits. **21** “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. **22** *Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23* And then *I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’*

Matthew 24:5,11,24...4 And Jesus answered and said to them, “*See to it that no one misleads you. 5* For *many will come in My name*, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and *will mislead many...11* *Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many...23* Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There *He is*,’ do not believe *him*. **24** For *false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead*, if possible, even the elect. **25** Behold, I have told you in advance.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15...12 But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in ***the matter about which they are boasting***. **13** For ***such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ***. **14** No wonder, for ***even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light***. **15** Therefore it is not surprising if ***his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds***.

1 Timothy 4:1...But ***the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron***

2 Timothy 3:1-9...But realize this, that ***in the last days difficult times will come***. **2** For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, **3** unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, **4** treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **5** holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. **6** For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, **7** always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. **8 *Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith.*** **9** But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also.

2 Timothy 4:3,4...**3** For ***the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine***; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, **4** and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

1 John 2:18...18 ***Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared***; from this we know that ***it is the last hour***. **19** ***They went out from us, but they were not really of us***; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but ***they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us***

1 John 3:7...7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; **8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning.** The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. **9 No one who is born of God practices sin,** because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. **10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.**

1 John 4:1,3...Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because **many false prophets have gone out into the world.** **2** By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; **3** and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; **this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.** **4** You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

2 John 7...7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. **This is the deceiver and the antichrist.** **8** Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. **9** Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. **10** If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting; **11** for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

Kim Riddlebarger on Jude 17-19

Turning to our text, in verse 17 we find a good indication that Jude is personally familiar with those receiving this letter. “But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jude speaks of the letter’s recipients as “loved of God,” an indication of personal affection as well as a reminder that all Christians are the objects of God’s love. That Jude’s readers should remember what the apostles told them certainly indicates a familiarity with the apostles’s teaching, which Jude has described to us in verse 3, as a “common salvation” and as a faith “once for all delivered.”

It is significant in this regard that the “predictions” of the Apostles were repeated, perhaps many times, and which includes the word (the “sayings”) of the apostles. Those receiving this letter from Jude, were well catechized in apostolic teaching. Jude exhorts these people to remember things they already know well. The problem is not ignorance of proper doctrine, but whether or not his readers will actually put into practice the things they already know to be true. This is every bit as much a dilemma for Christians living today, as it was for Christians living in the first century. We must strive to live out in daily life the same doctrines which we confess with our mouths. Practice should match profession.

The content of the “word” predicted by the apostles is spelled out in verse 18. “They said to you, `In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” That the apostles “said to you,” indicates that these were the men in Jesus’ close circle of associates (including the twelve apostles, and others such as Mark, Jude, James, etc.) whom we identify as the “apostolic circle.”

These men are apostles of the same Lord Jesus Christ, who was being denied by the false teachers then troubling the church. Peter says of them, in 2 Peter 2:1, “false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.” Jude has said of them (in v. 4), “for certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” From this declaration, it is clear that these false teachers and prophets hypocritically proclaim their allegiance to Jesus, but in practice deny the very “lord” whom they claim has bought them. These men are revealed to be charlatans in their doctrine, and by their conduct. They do not teach the things which Jesus taught his church. They do not do the things which Jesus commanded his people to do. They follow ungodly passions—not the commandments of God.

This is yet another instance in which someone from within the apostolic circle speaks of the apostolic church as already living in the last days. The author of Hebrews tells us (Heb.1:2) that “in these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”

In his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:17), Peter proclaimed that the “last days” had come with the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. “And in the last days it shall be,

God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.” Peter does the same in the opening chapter of his first epistle (Peter 1:20), “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.”

The Apostle Paul makes several references to Christians already living in the last days during his own lifetime, and offers the presence of false teachers as proof of this very fact. In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul warns, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.” Similarly in 2 Timothy 3:1 he adds, “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.” Jude’s readers had possibly heard this warning in person from both Peter and Paul, and they are now to remember the gravity and urgency of these repeated warnings.

The church has been living in the last days since the day of Pentecost. The fact that the church will be plagued by false teachers until the Lord returns certainly undermines the idea of a golden-age postmillennialism as held by a number of our Reformed brethren. But Jude’s point here is that because Jesus promised to return at any moment—but had not yet done so—a group of scoffers had arisen, who were familiar with Jesus’ teaching that he might return at any moment, and because Jesus hadn’t returned yet, began to use delay in the Lord’s return as an excuse to indulge their sinful flesh.

Their basic argument runs as follows. “Jesus promised to come back for a final judgment.” “He hasn’t.” “Maybe there will not be a final judgment.” “If there will be no final judgment, why bother to restrain our urges and passions?” What is so sad about this line of thinking is that so many professing Christians, who should have been able to see through this nonsense, were still taken in by these false teachers, and even joined them in the pursuit of ungodly pleasure. It was not just that these men were cynics—Jesus promised to come back, and hadn’t, so maybe his word will not come true. It was that these scoffers used the delay in the parousia as an excuse to live as they please, and as an opportunity to exploit others. These men are slaves to their ungodly passions—this is what they live to do. Ironically, they may deny the certainty of the Lord’s return, but the same apostles who taught us about Jesus’ return also told to expect the coming of the false teachers and scoffers.

Their presence in the church to which Jude is writing should not have come as a huge surprise. Remember what the apostles have told us. It is not a question of “if.” It is a matter of “when.” Whenever people offer us reasons as to why we can supposedly sin with impunity, we are probably dealing with one of the very people about whom Jude is warning.

In verse 19, Jude impresses upon his readers the great amount of damage these men can do if unopposed. “It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.” These men reveal themselves by placing their own self-interest ahead above the needs of the church in a manner that exceeds typical human selfishness, with which we all struggle. These men are not Christians—so they do not struggle with sin as genuine believers do. They think nothing of tearing apart the body of Christ if that is necessary to gain the ungodly pleasures they seek. They are users and exploiters, even if they appear pious and orthodox. Some, apparently, were even claiming that God speaks to them. These men will seek to draw followers unto themselves—and draw people away from Christ and those pastors and elders whom Christ has called to tend these congregations. Their agenda is profoundly personal, and entirely self-centered. Such false teachers seek money and sensual pleasure, and they even dare use their claim to dreams and revelation as a basis for doing so. Theirs is an agenda we see played out nightly on TBN.

They speak of God’s grace as though it were nothing but an excuse for their sin. “Jesus fulfilled the law,” they say. “So I’m not bound to obey it.” These are not people who are struggling with lusts of the flesh, as all Christians do. These men who do not have the Holy Spirit (although they claim to know the mind of God). These men live life in the flesh, which as Paul tells us in Romans 8:9 is the defining characteristic of those who know not Jesus Christ. Paul tells the Christians in Rome, “you, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” These men are not Christians. Their false doctrines and sinful ways ultimately give them away. They know nothing of the things of God, they only know the ways of this world. Their presence is proof that we are living in the last days.

The Five Tests of False Doctrine

Tim Challies

T D. Jakes says that God eternally exists in three manifestations, not three persons. Greg Boyd says God knows some aspects of the future, but that other future events are outside of his knowledge. Creflo Dollar says because we are created in the image of God, we are little gods. Mormonism says God revealed new scripture to Joseph Smith that supersedes the Bible. Roman Catholicism says we are justified by faith, but not by faith alone. This world is a murky madness of true and false. For every doctrine we know to be true, there seems to be a hundred pretenders.

No wonder, then, that John tells us to “test the spirits” and Paul says, “test everything” (1 John 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:21). It is our sacred responsibility to examine every doctrine to determine if it is true or false. But how can we distinguish sound doctrine from false? How can we distinguish teachers of truth from teachers of error?...As we test the doctrine, we learn our responsibility toward it: We either hold to it or we reject it....

Test 1: The Test of Origin

The first test is the test of origin. ***Sound doctrine originates with God; false doctrine originates with someone or something created by God.*** The Apostle Paul went to great lengths to convince the church in Galatia that the gospel he taught was not his own, but God’s. “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11-12). Even Jesus was clear that he taught only what God had instructed him to teach: “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me” (John 7:16). True doctrine originates with the God who is true (Titus 1:2).

Just as true doctrine is marked by its divine origin, false doctrine is marked by its worldly origin. Paul warned the Colossian church to avoid doctrine that is “according to human precepts and teachings” and told Timothy that some would “depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (Colossians 2:22, 1 Timothy 4:1). It is this simple: Sound teaching originates with God and false teaching originates with men or demons. When it comes to doctrine, if man made it, then we should not hold it. God is the Father of truth and Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44).

The test: Does this doctrine originate with God or has it been fabricated by someone or something else?

This leaves us with an obvious question: How can we know the origin of a doctrine? Sometimes its origin is obvious, but more often it is not. When we are uncertain, we can turn to our second test.

Test 2: The Test of Authority

The second test is the test of authority. ***Sound doctrine grounds its authority within the Bible; false doctrine grounds its authority outside the Bible.*** The Bible is God's inerrant, infallible, sufficient, complete, and authoritative revelation of himself to humanity. Doctrines that originate in the mind of God are recorded in the Word of God. There is a clear and necessary correlation between origin and authority, between God and his Word. We can think here of those noble Bereans who "received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). They knew that all doctrines must be compared to God's Word, his source of truth. Likewise, Paul praised the Thessalonians for their careful assessment and acceptance of his teaching because they understood its divine authority. "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Sound doctrine originates in the mind of God and is recorded in his authoritative self-revelation, the Bible.

The test: Does this doctrine appeal to the Bible for its authority? Or does it appeal to another scripture or another mind?

But a concern remains, because two teachers may both claim the authority of the Bible while teaching very different things. How can we know whose interpretation is correct? This is where we turn to the third test.

Test 3: The Test of Consistency

The third test is the test of consistency. ***Sound doctrine is consistent with the whole of Scripture; false doctrine is inconsistent with some parts of Scripture.*** There is a sameness or familiarity to true doctrine and a strangeness or unfamiliarity to false doctrine. The man who wrote the letter to the Hebrews warned his congregation about "diverse and strange teachings," while Paul warned Timothy about accepting "different doctrine" (Hebrews 13:9; 1 Timothy 1:3, 6:3). Both meant to emphasize that doctrine must always be compared to the established, accepted body of truth. Those who are knowledgeable about that body of truth will be in the best position to immediately identify and refute what is false.

This is tied to a key theological principle, “the analogy of faith,” which is often explained with the phrase “Scripture interprets Scripture.” If the Bible originates in the infallible mind of God, it must be consistent throughout. Because there can be no contradiction in the mind of God, there can be no contradiction in the revelation of God. What the Bible teaches in one place it cannot refute in another. Therefore, any true doctrine must be consistent with the whole of Scripture. Doctrine must never be treated in isolation, but always in light of a correct understanding of the entire Bible. Too many false teachers isolate verses or ideas that cannot withstand the scrutiny of the whole Book.

The test: Is this doctrine established or refuted by the entirety of Scripture?

Once we have tested doctrine and found it to be true, according to these three criteria, we can also see its soundness by its effects on us and those around us. That requires two more tests.

Test 4: The Test of Spiritual Growth

The fourth test is the test of spiritual growth. Sound doctrine is beneficial for spiritual health; false doctrine leads to spiritual weakness.

After instructing Timothy, Paul told him, “If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained [“nourished”] in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed” (1 Timothy 4:6). Timothy had trained himself in the Bible and Christian doctrine. He had nourished himself in the truths he had been exposed to since he was a child. And he had never stopped. Through this continual nourishment, this ongoing dining on the Word of God, he had grown spiritually healthy and strong. He had accumulated a thorough knowledge of God and his Word. This is why Paul called him a “man of God” with “sincere faith” (1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 1:5). Timothy’s constant nourishment in sound doctrine from the Word of God made him the man he was.

Sound doctrine makes spiritually healthy, mature, knowledgeable Christians. False doctrine makes spiritually unhealthy, immature, ignorant Christians who may be no Christians at all.

Test 5: The Test of Godly Living

The fifth test is the test of godly living. *Sound doctrine has value for godly living, false doctrine leads to ungodly living.* Truth never stands on its own, but always has implications in life. Doctrine is always meant to lead to doxology, worship, and purposeful living. “All Scripture is breathed out by God,” says Paul, “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” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Scripture is not to be known in an abstract sense, but intimately. It is to inform not only our minds, but our hearts and hands as well.

Paul charged Titus to “teach what accords with sound doctrine,” reminding him that such doctrine is “excellent and profitable for people” (3:8, 2:1). “What accords with” sound doctrine is its far-reaching implications, the duties that flow out of it. Thus, sound doctrine has value. It is profitable in teaching us to live as we ought to live. It equips us to do those things that are good for our neighbor and that bring honor and glory to our God. Truth has not been grasped until it has been lived. Sound doctrine profits us by training us to live in a way that pleases God. False doctrine weakens us by training us to live in a way that dishonors God.

Evaluation: The Determination of Quality

At this point we simply take all of the evidence from the three tests and make a conclusion about the quality of the doctrine in question. ***Sound doctrine originates with God, is recorded in the Word of God, is consistent with the whole revelation of God, and leads to both spiritual health and godly living. False doctrine originates with men or demons, is foreign to the Word of God, is inconsistent with the whole revelation of God, and leads to spiritual weakness and ungodly living.*** It must pass all of the tests in order to be sound. If it fails one, it fails all of them. This word “sound” refers to health and appears often in the New Testament. For example, Paul instructed Timothy, “Follow the pattern of the sound [“healthy”] words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13). To Titus he said, “Teach what accords with sound [“healthy”] doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

The task of the doctor is to evaluate a patient to declare him fit or unfit. The patient is fit when his whole body is functioning properly, free of disease. The task of the Christian is to evaluate every doctrine to declare it fit or unfit. John Stott says it characteristically well: “Christian doctrine is healthy in the same way as the human body is healthy. For Christian doctrine resembles the human body. It is a coordinated system consisting of different parts which relate to one another and together constitute a harmonious whole. If therefore our theology is maimed (with bits missing) or diseased (with bits distorted), it is not ‘sound’ or ‘healthy’.” Doctrine that passes the three tests is sound doctrine. It is pure and undefiled, true according to God’s unfailing standard of truth.

The evaluation: Based on the evidence, is this doctrine sound or false?

Action: Determine Your Responsibility

Having thoroughly tested the doctrine and examined its effects, we are able to determine how to respond to it. ***Sound doctrine must be accepted and held fast; false doctrine must be denied and rejected.*** When Jesus spoke to the believers in Thyatira, he commended them for clinging to truth and told them to “hold fast what you have until I come” (Revelation 2:25). Paul described the elder as a man who “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).

Our responsibility is clear: We must accept and hold fast to what is true, and we must deny and reject what is false. Likewise, the church must welcome those who teach sound doctrine and rebuke those who do not. If they do not heed correction, the church must reject them, removing them and their influence (1 Corinthians 5:9).

Conclusion

In summary, true doctrine (content) originates with God (origin), is grounded in the Bible (authority), and agrees with the whole of Scripture (consistency). Because such doctrine is sound (quality), it is healthy (benefit), and profitable (value) for us, and we are responsible for holding it (responsibility). False doctrine (content) originates with man (origin), is not grounded in the Bible (authority), and contradicts portions of Scripture (consistency). Because such doctrine is unsound (quality), it is unhealthy (benefit) and unprofitable (value) for us, and we are responsible for rejecting it (responsibility).