



Study guide for False teachers and false teachings

Terms and biblical data

HERESY: From the Greek word *haireisis*, meaning choice.' It refers to teachings that contradict another teaching that has been accepted as the norm. From Greek *haireisis* "a taking or choosing for oneself, a choice, a means of taking; a deliberate plan, purpose; philosophical sect, school," from *haireisthai* "take, seize," middle voice of *hairein* "to choose,". It was to convey the

idea of choosing for oneself as opposed to receiving from God what He has been passed down. The early church fathers used the word for it alludes to the choice made in the fall of humanity. Adam and Eve made a choice in the garden. A choice to rebel against revealed truth and define good and evil, truth and error on their own terms rather than have God pass down His Truth, His Morality as they walked together in the cool of the day.

ORTHODOX: From the Greek words ortho, “straight, and doxa, “belief, opinion. In Christianity, it means general teachings that has been as the norm.

Both heresy and orthodoxy are thoroughly Christian words. Irenaeus coined both of them. He coined the word orthodox to characterize his own teachings, which most other Church Fathers agreed with, and he also coined the word heresy to define the teachings of his adversaries.

Even though Irenaeus coined the word as we use it now. The idea extends all the way back to the New Testament.

HERESY AND ORTHODOXY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We will Trace the development of the concepts behind the terms of heresy and orthodoxy in Scripture.

Heresy in the New Testament

The Greek word from which “heresy” derives (αἵρεσις, haireisis) originally meant “choice” or “opinion.” The word appears nine times in the New Testament, often referring to a religious sect characterized by its distinct opinions or practices (Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5; 26:5). Josephus used the term this way in referring to Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. But the term is also used more specifically.

The term “heresy” could also characterize those who departed from acceptable beliefs and conduct (Acts 24:14; 28:22). The word appears twice in Paul’s letters to describe unhealthy divisions that should be avoided (1 Cor 11:19; Gal 5:20). Although Paul instructed believers to limit their fellowship with those who supported such factions, he claimed that the existence of heretical groups helped distinguish the true believers from those who were causing division (1 Cor 11:19).

“Heresy” eventually came to mean a belief deviating from established doctrine in major areas like the Trinity, Christology, and soteriology. Those who embrace error in such cardinal doctrines are known as heretics. The term seems to be used this way in 2 Pet 2:1 to describe how false teachers had taken a dangerous departure from sound doctrine by denying Jesus. Early church leaders such as Ignatius (second century ad) used the term “heresy” this way consistently (e.g., Ignatius, To the Trallians, 6; Eph., 6). Additionally, the word was often applied to the gnostics during the second and third centuries ad (e.g., Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 4.7, 22; Epiphanius, Panarion). The term was specifically applied by early church fathers to describe those who had departed from established Christian doctrine (doctrine which is most clearly seen in the articulation of the Apostles’ Creed and later the Nicene Creed; e.g., Origen, Against Celsus, 3.13; Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies, 10.22). The “heretics” most in question were people convincing (or attempting to convince) others that their viewpoints were correct. For the early church fathers, it seems that heretics could also be received back into the church under certain conditions (e.g., Canon of the Council in Trullo, XCV).

Orthodoxy in the New Testament

The term “orthodoxy” describes right belief. Although the word derives from Greek terms “straight” (ὀρθός, orthos) and “praise” (δόξα, doxa), the term itself is not found in the New Testament. In the Gospels, the concept of orthodoxy is often represented by the word “truth”

(e.g., John 4:23–24; 8:32, 40–46; 14:6). Jesus’ principle ministry involved teaching truth, which He claimed was contained in His words and the Hebrew Scriptures.

The concept of orthodoxy in Paul’s writings is best captured by his use of the phrases “sound teaching” (1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1), “sound words” (1 Tim 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13), and “sound faith” (Titus 1:13; 2:2). The foundation for this teaching was established by the New Testament apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20; 3:5) and handed down from one generation of believers to the next (Luke 1:2; 2 Tim 2:2; 3:14–15; 1 John 1:5; Jude 1:3). The contents of orthodox belief, according to Paul, must be guarded by those to whom they are entrusted (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:13–14; Titus 1:9) so that Christians remain pure in their doctrine (Titus 2:7).

Paul cautions Christians who wish to retain their orthodox standards to keep their distance from those who depart from the apostolic instructions regarding belief and conduct (2 Thess 3:6, 14). He also states that those whose teachings are contrary to apostolic orthodoxy should be refuted and silenced from speaking in the church (Titus 1:9–10; see also 1 Tim 6:3–4).

Heresies quick overview

1. Heresy as deviant teaching

Heb 13:9 See also Gal 1:6-7; 2Ti 4:3-4

2. Heresies and the factional nature of Judaism

The party of the Pharisees Ac 26:5 See also Ac 15:5; Php 3:5-6

The party of the Sadducees Ac 23:8 See also Mt 22:23 pp Mk 12:18 pp Lk 20:27
Christianity was perceived as a heresy within Judaism Ac 24:14 See also Ac 24:5; 28:22

In its first theological sense, “heresy” meant a chosen pattern of belief and practice that differs from that of others in the same religious community. Acts 5:17 refers to the “heresy” of the Sadducees, and 15:5; 26:5 to that of the Pharisees; yet both had their place within Judaism. Christianity, too, appears as a “heresy” within Judaism (Acts 24:5, 14; 28:22).¹

3. Heresies within the church

The imposition of Jewish regulations on Gentile converts Ac 15:1 See also Gal 6:12-13; 1Ti 1:3-7; Tit 1:10

Heresies concerning the person of Jesus Christ 2Jn 7 See also 1Jn 2:22-23; 4:1-3

Heresies concerning the return of Jesus Christ 2Th 2:1-2 See also Mt 24:4-5 pp Mk 13:5-6 pp Lk 21:8; Mt 24:23-24 pp Mk 13:21-22

Paul pronounces the Judaizing heresy—the false teaching that Christians, particularly Gentile believers, must keep the law of Moses to maintain their salvation—a “different” or nongospel and designates its proponents as “dogs,”

¹ Sidebar by Robert H. Gundry, In *The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible* Edt. Gordon D. Fee and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2011) pg. 710

“evil workers” who should be “accursed” (Gal. 1:6–9; Phil. 3:2). He turns Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan because they “rejected conscience” and “suffered shipwreck in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:19–20). Thus “heresy” comes to mean a divergence from correct belief (“orthodoxy”) and practice (“orthopraxy”), though these two aspects are so closely linked that the New Testament hardly distinguishes the two..”²

4. The origins of heresy

Erroneous human teaching Col 2:8 See also Eph 4:14; Col 2:20-22

Deceitful demonic power 1Ti 4:1 See also 1Jn 4:2-3,6

5. Christian opposition to heresy

Heresy warned against 2Pe 3:17 See also 1Ti 4:7; Tit 1:10-14

Heresy condemned 2Pe 2:3 See also Gal 1:8-9; 2Pe 2:17-22

² Sidebar by Robert H. Gundry, In The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible Edt. Gordon D. Fee and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2011) pg. 710

A little more nuance

Well, What most people think is heresy?

a number of possible solutions (Yet these are not adequate definitions)

- **The Conciliar Answer:** Heresy is whatever one of the seven ecumenical councils said it was.(Greek Orthodox)
- **The Power Struggle:** Heresy is just the label for the "loser" in the debate. (Post-modern)
- **The "Other" Answer:** Heresy is an exclusionary process used to establish the identity of some group. (Proud-estant Liberalism)

- **Poop in My Coffee:** Heresy is whatever corrupts the essence of Christianity - anything unlike what I was taught is heresy. Not Pre-Trib, your a heretic. Believe in sign gifts you a damnable hieratic (2 Peter 3:1 JKV) (Fundamentalist).
- **Somehow explained away.** Heresy is never really to be used. It is a bad word. No, I don't study theology! No, I will not define my terms! Can't we just be sweet to each other. (Shallow modern Christian)
- **Just Shut Up!:** Heresy is rejecting church authority. (Catholic)

Here are some points that are necessarily true of heresy in general

1. Heresy requires an exercise of authority.

Today, determining, "what is heresy?" can not be a purely individualistic affair. I can't determine by myself what "heresy" is, though I can certainly offer opinions as to if an idea is heresy and if a group should be declared to be heretical.

2. Heresy necessarily involves power and exclusion.

Today, both ideas are understood in negative terms. Yet, there is nothing necessarily wrong with either of these, when properly administered. In and of themselves, neither power nor exclusion are bad. Church leaders sometimes need to use both for the benefit of the body. For example: exercising authority (power) in excluding a dangerous person from a children's ministry.

In an age of spin, and rash judgements tweeted in seconds leaders need to press the pause button, take a moment to remember the power of labels. Leaders should always be aware that when they use the label "heresy" they are wielding the power to exclude. My fear is that if we don't make this explicit, we'll wield the power without being aware that we're doing so. And, that is exceptionally dangerous. It's like giving someone a box and not bothering to mention that there's dynamite inside. We can't wield carefully what we don't know that we're wielding.

3. Heresy undermines the Gospel.

The idea of "heresy" is at its core something that undermines the essence of Christianity. (1) Heresy is about essential, rather than peripheral, matters. Granted, it's not always easy to tell the difference given the interconnect nature of Christian theology. (2) Heresy almost always comes from within. We make a mistake when we see heresy as something that attacks Christianity from without. Instead, we must realize that heresy is always something that arises from within the body and must be dealt with as such.

Clarifying Addendum:

1. Recognize the difficulty: it needs to make the appeal to authority/power more explicit. Rather than simply presume that heresy is self-evident, we need to recognize that sifting heresy from orthodoxy is a difficult process that will often require a final decision to be made by those entrusted with the authority to do so.

2. Realize heresy is both in beliefs and behavior (Titus and Jude attest to this). Bad teaching bares Fruit (behavior/ethics positions promoted) that drastically deviate from biblical boundaries of behavior. we need to realize that the "essence" of Christianity is more than a set of beliefs. Commonly held Beliefs shape the ethics all views a community holds and if their ethics are "hinky" - then something is up with their Beliefs. For Example: Oneida Community . This kind of test is what Jesus meant when he taught you will know them by their fruit. Also remember the flip side, He is a hypocrite and maybe an unbeliever but not a heretic, who, while keeping the outward appearance of Christian religion, devises or follows false opinions for a desire for human approval, earthly reward, or worldly pleasures" 3. The idea of Christianity's "essence" is far too vague. Heresy is better defined as something that undermines the Gospel itself. I realize that gets us into a discussion of what the Gospel is.

My working definition of heresy:

Heresy is any form of Christianity (in practice and belief) that undermines the Gospel (explicitly or implicitly) and is determined to be not in agreement with the Scriptures by a

reasoning argument, and by comparison with the shape of basic traditional orthodoxy.

Thus, A heretic is one who obstinately holds to and publicly teaches, heresy, despite the Christian communities opposition and after private and public censure has been exercised, and continues to do so.

The conclusion to Craig Blomberg article on heresy some years ago in The Journal of evangelical theology is a fitting word on this word "heresy".

Conclusion:

The collection of false teaching and immoral behavior that NT authors most strongly oppose is an interesting one. A strong insistence on both the full deity and the full humanity of Christ naturally appears. Salvation by grace through faith, countering all forms of legalism, nomism, and ethnocentrism, proves central, but one must submit to the resurrected Jesus as total Master (Rom 10:9–10) and exhibit the fruit befitting repentance. The only absolutely crucial eschatological tenet is the fact of Christ's still future, visible return. With respect to what systematicians usually include under "sanctification" appears an insistence on keeping security and perseverance in balance, and on avoiding the twin errors of defeatism and triumphalism, including in its extreme forms perfectionism. After that, one is hard pressed to find further absolutely central theological tenets for which NT writers strongly contend.

At least as crucial as correct theology is correct behavior. The NT strongly opposes antinomianism, immorality more generally (especially in its twin, opposing manifestations of asceticism and hedonism), and a factious or a divisive spirit. It insists that stewardship of one's material possessions functions as "exhibit A" of the good works that must necessarily flow from the life of one truly redeemed. It consistently places morality above ritual, an observation that should address us loudly in the current evangelical "worship wars"! Our inspired authors clearly oppose non-Christian religions and their practitioners, but their dominant strategy is to call them to repentance via making the gospel as winsome as possible. The harshest rhetoric is almost always reserved for the ultraconservative religious insider who transgresses key boundaries, especially leaders who should certainly know better. By way of contrast, the last century of American evangelicalism has majored on creating extensive doctrinal statements to separate itself from outsiders, usually adding numerous adiaphora to more central matters. The ETS is a rare exception but, paradoxically, our doctrinal statement lacks any requirement for salvation. And when evangelical "lifestyle" statements have addressed ethical concerns, the lists have often proved quite different from NT vice and virtue lists.

In short, our tendency has been to fight our fiercest battles at the theological periphery of evangelicalism, where we believe the limits of tolerance have been exceeded. We rarely ask who in our midst may be equally mis-guided (and possibly even more dangerous) because they have drawn the boundaries too narrowly rather than too broadly. As Arland Hultgren's survey of the earliest eras of Church history reminds us, one can become heretical by being either too broad-minded or too narrow-minded.⁶⁰ It would be a salutary exercise to survey the history of the ETS to see if we have ever addressed the second of these categories, having obviously addressed the first numerous times. It would be even more salutary as we currently wrestle with definitions of orthodoxy more generally to make sure that we address both extremes.³

Quotes to think about

Dressed up Error:

"Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than truth itself."⁴ - Irenaeus

Note: As Irenaeus understand it, error come packaged as non-threatening as possible, that

is untruth in a Mr Rogers cardigan, sensible khakis and a kind smile. In short, heresy is the kind of error you want to take home to meet the parents.

Luther's scorched earth method

"I am not permitted to let my love be so merciful as to tolerate and endure false doctrine.

When faith and doctrine are concerned and endangered, neither love nor patience are in order...when these are concerned, neither toleration nor mercy are in order, but only anger, dispute, and destruction - to be sure, only with the Word of God as our weapon." - Martin Luther

Craig Blomberg, The New Testament Definition of Heresy (Or when Do Jesus and the Apostles really Get Mad?)
³ JETS 45/1 (March 2002) 59–72. The pdf can be found at [HERE](#)

⁴ Irenaeus Against Heresies 1.2

The Fruit of False Teachers and Teachings: SCHISM

The Greek word schisma literally denotes a rent, or cleft (cf. Matt. 9:16; Mark 2:21); hence metaphorically, discord or division (John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). This is its meaning in 1 Cor. 1:10; 11:18; 12:25.

1 Corinthians 12:25 is vital to a proper understanding of a schism: "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another." Thus, schism is a rending of the body of Christ. It is a sin that exhibits a carelessness about the welfare of the body in general and its other members in particular. It is a sin against charity, a selfish introduction of dissention and division where there ought to be mutual tolerance and love.

This distinguishes schism from scriptural separation.* Scripturally, heretics (see Heresy) must be rejected (Titus 3:10) for they are schismatics from the body of true believers, having followed a self-willed opinion in preference to God's revealed truth. Thus, separation from a communion on the grounds of the purity of fundamental Christian doctrine is not schism. For example, Calvin argued that the scriptural marks of a true church are the preaching of the pure gospel and the valid administration of the sacraments. Rome did not maintain these basic marks of a true church. Therefore, in separating from her the Reformers were not guilty of schism. Rome was the party, or sect, guilty of schism, for she had departed from the faith of the gospel. The same argument holds good today. In an age when ecumenism is rampant, those who stand for Biblical separation are denounced as schismatics and are frequently likened to such sects as the Donatists. But no Christian can deny that the ecumenical movement progresses by

compromising the essentials of the gospel. Christians should therefore separate from ecumenical churches. The same goes for churches where modernism and liberalism dominate.

It is not right to remain in such fellowships merely because they nominally retain their ancient confessional standards. The argument is frequently put, for example, that while a Presbyterian church retains the Westminster Standards, it would be schism to separate from it. However, when the Reformers separated from Rome, she avowed her acceptance of the ancient creeds of the church. But that did not make her a pure church. It merely denoted the fact that lying and falsehood were added to her other impurities. Calvin said, "If the Church is 'the pillar and ground of truth' (1 Tim. 3:15), it is certain that there is no church where lying and falsehood have usurped the ascendancy." If that was true of Rome with her professed acceptance of the ancient creeds of the church, it is no less true of those once Protestant churches that are seeking reunion with an unrepentant Rome, or are open to all great doctrinal impurity. To sum up: schism is an expression of self-will or of heresy that leads to the setting up of sects —any group that is built on heresy is a schism from the body of Christ. Separation is on Biblical grounds, is commanded by the Lord (Eph. 5:11; 2 Cor. 6:14–18; 1 Tim. 6:3–5), and aims at maintaining essential Christian doctrine and practice. ⁵

"schism" Alan Cairns, Dictionary of Theological terms (AmG Pub 2002) ⁵

Common distinctions for discernment

The ESV study bible has a helpful section on this issue. It gives four categories into which a teaching one believes can be placed.

Essential vs. Peripheral Doctrine

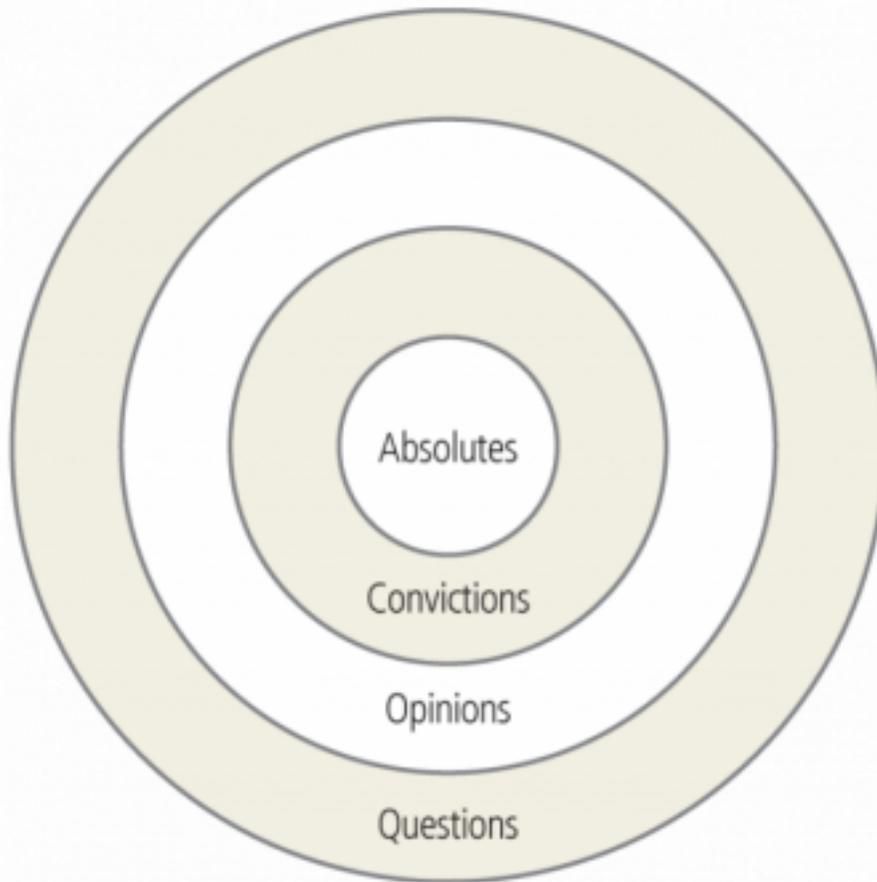
The ability to discern the relative importance of theological beliefs is vital for effective Christian life and ministry. Both the purity and unity of the church are at stake in this matter. The relative importance of theological issues can fall within four categories: (1) *absolutes* define the core beliefs of the Christian faith;

(2) *convictions*, while not core beliefs, may have significant impact on the health and effectiveness of the church;

(3) *opinions* are less-clear issues that generally are not worth dividing over; and

(4) *questions* are currently unsettled issues.

These categories can be best visualized as concentric circles, similar to those on a dart board, with the absolutes as the "bull's-eye" (see diagram).



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Where an issue falls within these categories should be determined by weighing the cumulative force of at least seven considerations:

- (1) biblical clarity;
- (2) relevance to the character of God;
- (3) relevance to the essence of the gospel;
- (4) biblical frequency and significance (how often in Scripture it is taught, and what weight Scripture places upon it);
- (5) effect on other doctrines;
- (6) consensus among Christians (past and present); and
- (7) effect on personal and church life.

These criteria for determining the importance of particular beliefs must be considered in light of their cumulative weight regarding the doctrine being considered. For instance, just the fact that a doctrine may go against the general consensus among believers (see item 6) does not necessarily mean it is wrong, although that might add some weight to the argument against it. All the categories should be considered collectively in determining how important an issue is to the Christian faith. The ability to rightly discern the difference between core doctrines and legitimately disputable matters will keep the church from either compromising important truth or needlessly dividing over peripheral issues.

Two common Types of Heresy

Formal Heresy - making a radical teaching a part of your formal doctrinal statement often promoting and proclaim the heresy as truth.

Functional Heresy - teaching a heresy without realizing it or teaching something close to a heresy because of an over-focus on something else or bad exegesis.

Some would say the second, is not possible by the definition of a heretic classically understood as one who consciously reject the censor of other believers and the discipline of larger bodies of believers. Yet in market- American Christianity most churches don't practice church discipline.

Historic Reformed Dissections: three kinds of error in doctrine.

The Reformed orthodox in connection with the idea of fundamental articles, note three kinds of doctrinal error:

- (1) errors directly against a fundamental article (contra fundamentum)
- (2) errors around a fundamental or in indirect contradiction to it (circa fundamentum)
- (3) errors beyond a fundamental article (praeter fundamentum)

The first kind of error is a direct attack--such as those launched by the Socinians--against the divinity of Christ or the Trinity. The second is not a direct negation or an antithesis but rather an indirect or secondary error ultimately subversive of a fundamental--such as a belief in God that refuses to acknowledge his providence. The third category of error does not address fundamental articles directly or indirectly but rather involves faith in problematic and curious questions (quaestiones problematicas et curiosas) that do not arise out of the revealed Word--hay and stubble!--and that, because of their curiosity and vanity, constitute diversions from and impediments to salvation. - Richard Muller, ⁶

Note: Here we have Why reformed people so often call people heretics. Points two and three.

Richard Muller, Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 1:Prolegomena to Theology, p. 422-3. ⁶

The following chart provides some basic points to keep in mind about how ancient heresies show up today and what the correct, biblical teachings are. Classic heresies tend to cycle back around in the history of the church. This is because of the common and logical point of departure from which the heresies deviate from the churches teachings. As an example of this repetition of ancient heresies throughout history the chart below shows how they tends to look today. Also a great chart on the Christological heresies at the bottom of the pdf.

ANCIENT HERESY	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TODAY	CORRECT APOSTOLIC TEACHING	COMMENTS
GNOSTICISM	Confusing God with his creation. Taking things and people as part of the divine. Rejecting the physical world as evil. Belief that salvation is inside every person. Speaking about Jesus as a guru or only as a great teacher. "Pop spirituality" based on Gnostic ideas. The Secret, The Power of Now, and many self-heip teachings fall into this	God is the Creator of all things. The world is good, though corrupted through human sin. Salvation is possible only through Jesus.	Christians need to be careful not to reject this material world. Radical separation of the body and soul is not a biblical teaching. God loves the world he made. He blessed it. We should do likewise.

	category.		
MARCIONISM	Rejecting the Old Testament. Rejecting anything that sounds too Jewish from the New Testament. Completely divorcing the Old Testament from the New Testament.	The Old and New Testaments together are the Word of God. Some ideas and concepts in the Old Testament continued in the New. Others Jesus fulfilled and are no longer binding in the New Testament. God reveals himself in both Testaments. But Jesus is the fullness of God's revelation to humanity.	Sometimes Christians make too strong a distinction between the Law and the Gospel. The New Testament revelation is more complete than the Old Testament revelation because of Jesus (Heb. 1:1-3). The revelation of the New Testament depends on God's works and words in the Old Testament.
MONARCHIANISM	Denying the trinity. Claiming one god with three functions: First appearing as Father, then as Son, and now as Holy Spirit. Both forms are active: Adoptionism and Modalism.	There is one God in three distinct Persons: God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three persons participate in the divine nature but have distinct personalities. All three are involved in God's work of Creation, redemption, and restoration.	Some groups believe that only Jesus (of the three members of the Trinity) is God. This is a form of modalism. Other groups, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, confess a form of adoptionism. They deny that Jesus is fully God. Rather, they may believe Jesus is an angel, a special divine being, but not God.
ARIANISM	Claims that Jesus was human only and became divine. So preach Jesus humanity to make the point we can do what he did that his divinity is functional not considered.	Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity. He is fully God and fully human. He is one person with two natures, divine and human. The natures are joined, without mixed.	Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons show clear examples of such errors.
DOCETISM	Claims that Jesus was only divine and merely appeared human.	Jesus suffered, was hungry, and was tempted like any other human.	It is possible to emphasize Jesus' divine character to the point of forgetting that he is fully human as well.

How do we assess Christian teaching?

Doctrine can also be categorized in the simplest terms: It is either true or false.

To determine if a doctrine is true or false in its content, we can use biblical terminology to ask several questions.

In origin, is it from God the Creator or from God's creation?

In authority, is it biblical or unbiblical?

In consistency, is it familiar or unfamiliar?

In quality, is it sound or unsound?

In benefit, is it healthy or unhealthy?

In value, is it profitable or unprofitable?

When we have properly evaluated the doctrine, we see our responsibility toward it: we must either hold to it or reject it.

Perhaps it is helpful to lay this out in a table:

Content	True	False
Origin	Creator	Creation
Authority	Biblical	Unbiblical
Consistency	Familiar	Unfamiliar
Quality	Sound	Unsound
Benefit	Healthy	Unhealthy
Value	Profitable	Unprofitable
The Christian's Responsibility	Accept ✓	Reject ✗

True doctrine (content) originates with God (origin), comes from the Bible (authority), and agrees with the whole of Scripture (consistency). Because such doctrine is sound (quality), it is healthy (benefit to our moral development), and profitable (value for our Christian life and witness) for us, and we are responsible for holding it (responsibility).

False doctrine (content) originates with man (origin), does not come from 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).

The Christian's responsibility is clear: We are to learn God's truth by searching God's Word. We must carefully evaluate every teaching according to God's unfailing standard. What passes the test is sound, and what fails the test is false.

Falsification: Four Bible study guide

A personal study guide for study of the biblical concepts of false teachers and teachings. This ⁷ Bible study was developed to study the subject thematically and comprehensively. As you move through the first two studies, each point studying the Scriptures, the cross references of each point are given in a sequence to build on each other and aid in hermeneutic of using scripture to interpret scripture. The last two look a little deeper at the letters of Jude and the third letters of John and organizing a little more sermonically.

Introduction to the Study

Falsification means both (1) the action of falsifying information (2) an investigation into fraud, (the corruption of a message.). Thus it describes **both** *what false teachers do to the Faith and the study of false teachers and teaching.*

Study One: False Teachers

False teachers: Those who teach error and in so doing lead others astray. They are to be distinguished from false prophets who are equally condemned in Scripture.

1. The OT prophets warned God's people against being led astray by false teachers Isa 9:16; Eze 34:2 See also Isa 3:12; 8:20; Jer 2:8; 10:21; 23:1; Eze 22:26; Mal 2:7-8

2. Jesus Christ condemned false teachers

He opposed legalism and hypocrisy Mt 5:19

He identified the teachers of the law and Pharisees as false teachers Mt 23:1-33 pp Lk 11:42-52 See also Mt 15:14

He warned his followers against them Mt 16:6,12 pp Mk 8:15 pp Lk 12:1

3. The condemnation of false teachers in the early church

Paul urges his readers to avoid false teachers 1Ti 6:3-6

See also Ac 20:29-31; Ro 16:17-18; 2Co 11:3-4

The Corinthian church had been undiscerningly tolerant of Jewish deceivers in their midst; Eph 4:14

The Colossian heresy taught that the combination of faith in Jesus Christ with man-made regulations was necessary for salvation: Col 2:4,8

Paul warns against the heretical teachers in the Ephesian church: Acts 19, 1Ti 1:3-4,7

See also 1Ti 4:1-3; 6:20-21; Tit 1:10-11; Heb 13:9; 2Jn 9-10, *Possible Connection to The Nicolaitans*: Rev 2:6,15, Rev 2:14 *the followers of Balaam*; Rev 2:20

Excursus On False Teaching and Teachers in Colossians

Paul addresses the Colossian church with particular concern for false teachers (2:8–23). Moo concludes that “the purpose of the letter ... is to provide the resources Colossian Christians need to fend off ... false teaching” (Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 46).

Adapted from the *DICTIONARY OF BIBLE THEMES* Eds. Martin Manser, Alister E. McGrath,
⁷ J. I. Packer, Logos Bible software.

These false teachers appear to have threatened the church by spreading a philosophy that:

- contradicted Paul’s teaching according to Christ (2:8);
- emphasized rituals, ascetic practices, and the worship of angels (2:16–18);
- involved regulations based on human teaching (2:20–23).

In response to this heresy, Paul reminds the Colossians that their life is identified with Christ’s death and life (3:3–4). The false teachers’ practices might have “an appearance of wisdom,” but they hold “no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (2:23 ESV).

The precise origin and philosophy of these false teachers remains unclear. Since Paul does not give a thorough description of the heretical teaching, it can only be guessed from relevant historical possibilities. In Dunn’s view, the options include: Hellenistic or pre-Gnostic syncretism; Jewish teachings; or a combination of the two (Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 26–29).

Dunn and Wright understand the heresy to have been distinctly Jewish (Wright, 31). Judaism certainly influenced the false teaching in matters like circumcision (2:11, 3:11) and Sabbath observance (2:16). However, Bruce argues that there is “a degree of asceticism not usually associated with Jewish tradition” (Bruce, *Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon*, 18). In the view of some scholars (e.g., Bruce, Melick, Moo, O’Brien), the heresy likely was a combination of distinct Jewish elements mixed with local folk religion or secular elements (some form of syncretism).



Zodiac with the sun-god Helios surrounded by astrological symbols; From floor mosaic in the Jewish synagogue at Sepphoris. (Wikimedia Commons)

To understand syncretism in Judaism just look at the place of astrology in Jewish worship and it will help unpack Paul's words in Colossians. It is likely that astrology was practiced among observant Jews in the first century. While not a Jewish practice or teaching as such, astrology made its way into Jewish thought, likely through its exile in Babylon, and it can be seen in the many references to it in the Talmud. Astrological statements became accepted and worthy of debate and discussion by Torah scholars. Opinions varied: some rabbis rejected the validity of astrology; others accepted its validity but forbid practicing it; still others thought its practice to be meaningful and permitted. Such syncretism was likely evident throughout the Roman era. The imagery even became part of their worship. A full zodiac mosaic (pictured above) was uncovered at the Sepphoris Synagogue, an ancient synagogue discovered in Sepphoris, a Roman-era Jewish city in the Galilee. It dates to the fourth or fifth century but given the references in the Talmud. In light of such evidence, the mixing of astrology and Jewish belief was likely alive and well in the first century.

4. Hymenaeus and Philetus are cited as examples of false teachers 2Ti 2:17-18

5. Those who teach will be judged particularly strictly: Jas 3:1
See also 2Co 11:13-15; Gal 1:6-9; 5:10

Note: If you're a Bible teacher and the point in James 3:1, is not a sobering thought that puts a lump in your throat, then you have no fear of God before your eyes. You take your calling and God's commitment to his word way too lightly.

Study Two: False Teachings

False Teaching: Scripture repeatedly warns against false teachings, which deny or distort some aspect of the gospel. The origin of such teachings is attributed either to human error or to demonic inspiration.

1. Examples of false teachings Rev 2:14-15

See also Mt 5:19; 2Th 2:1-2; 1Ti 4:1-3; Rev 2:20

2. Qualities of false teachings

They are valueless Mt 15:9 pp Mk 7:7

See also Isa 29:13; Eph 5:6; Col 2:20-23; 1Ti 1:3-7

They are destructive in their nature 2Pe 2:1

See also Mt 7:15; Ac 20:29-30; Tit 1:10-11

Exegetical insight on 2 Peter 2:1 a short Word study

Damnable heresies (αἰρέσεις ἀπωλείας). Lit., heresies of destruction. Rev., destructive heresies. Heresy is a transcript of αἵρεσις, the primary meaning of which is choice; so that a heresy is, strictly, the choice of an opinion contrary to that usually received; thence transferred to the body of those who profess such opinions, and therefore a sect. So Rev., in margin, sects of perdition. Commonly in this sense in the New Testament (Acts 5:17; 15:5; 28:22), though the Rev. has an odd variety in its marginal renderings. See Acts. 24:14; 1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20. The rendering heretical doctrines seems to agree better with the context; false teachers bringing in sects is awkward. But 'Damnable heresies' rolls off the tongue like honey and honestly just makes me smile.

They have the capacity to lead people astray Ac 20:30

See also Eph 4:14; 1Ti 6:20-21; Heb 13:9; 2Pe 2:14-15; 1Jn 2:26

They may be popular 2Pe 2:2 See also Mt 24:4-5 pp Mk 13:5-6;

See also 2Ti 4:3; 2Pe 2:18-19; 1Jn 4:1-5

They may be accompanied by miraculous signs Mt 24:24 pp Mk 13:22

See also 2Th 2:9-10; Rev 13:11-15

3. The origin of false teachings

Demonic inspiration 1Ti 4:1-2 See also 2Co 11:3-4; 1Jn 4:1-3; Rev

16:13-14 Human error 2Pe 2:3 See also Col 2:8; 1Ti 6:20-21

4. Discerning false teachings

By their content 1Jn 4:2-3

See also 1Co 12:3; 1Jn 2:20-23; 2Jn 7-11

By the teacher's lifestyle Mt 7:15-20

See also 2Co 11:20; 1Jn 3:7-10; Jude 4

By their effects 1Ti 6:3-5

See also 1Ti 1:3-4; 2Ti 2:16-18; Rev 2:20

5. The antidote to false teachings

Holding fast to the true gospel 1Jn 2:24

See also Gal 1:6-9; 1Ti 1:18-20; 2Ti 1:13-14

Shunning false teachers Ro 16:17-18

See also 2Ti 3:1-9; Tit 3:9-11; 2Jn 9-11

Study Three: False teachers in Jude

DESCRIPTIONS OF FALSE TEACHERS

1. Rely on personal revelation (dreamers), (v.8)
2. Defile the human body, (v.8) ie. sin activities.
3. Reject authority, (v.8) it is hard to be under authority. They take some form of rebellion.
4. Speak evil of authorities, (v.8) speak insurrection against apostles of the lamb.
5. Serving only themselves, (v.12) selfish.

A. Seven descriptive metaphors

1. Brute beast, (v.10) follow fleshly instinct.
2. Blemishes in fellowship, (v.12) infection in church.
3. Self serving Shepherds (v.12)
4. Late autumn trees, (v.12) no fruit.
5. Clouds without water, (v.12) lack substance and empty. The ones needing rain like a farmer is disappointed.
6. Raging waves, (v.13) always causing problem, no peace
7. Wandering stars, (v.13) no light or true knowledge

B. Three descriptions rooted in Old Testament stories.

1. The way of Cain, (v.11)
2. Balaam's error (v.11)
3. Korah's rebellion (v.11)

8 THINGS TO KEEP YOU STRAIGHT (Jude 20-24)

1. The Word. "Building yourselves up on your most holy faith" (v.20).
2. Prayer [empowered by the Spirit]. "Praying in the Holy Spirit" (v.20).
3. Fellowship. "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (v.21).
4. Hope. "Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (v.21).
5. Ministry to others. "And on some have compassion, making a distinction" (v.22).
6. Evangelism. "But others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire" (v.23).
7. Separation from sin. "Hating even the garment defiled by the flesh" (v.23).
8. Begins and ends with assurance of salvation. "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation" (v.3). "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (v. 24).

Study Four: Before they were Heretics: a study third John

A. INTRODUCTION

1. This letter centers around four men:
 - John: the writer and protector of God's work
 - Gaius: looked after traveling preachers
 - Diotrephes: an egotistical leader who mistreated traveling ministers
 - Demetrius: a leader of good reputation
2. They represent both positive and negative examples.
3. John is a circulatory letter (for many different church in a network) and likely sent with the letter of II John. II John tells who not to let speaking in the congregation. III John tells how to treat good ministers, and corrects those who mistreat them. Here we have a practical advice on how to deal with problematic ministers, one is the on his way to the false teacher..

4. It is in assessing and comparing these four people we can learn about how false teachers are made.

B. JOHN: THE GENTLE ROCK

“From John the elder, to Gaius whom I deeply love” (v.1). “I have much to tell you. I won’t write, but will soon tell you face to face. Friends have sent their love. Give my special greetings to everyone” (v. 13, ELT).

1. John probably led Gaius to Christ, “My children” (v. 4).
2. John wanted Gaius to help take care of itinerant ministers.
3. Uses his usual vocabulary, i.e., truth, love, children, received, etc. He stated truth clearly, directly, and simply.

C. GAIUS: ONE WHO ACTED RIGHT (v. 2-3, 5-7).

1. John prays for Gaius to prosper, “That you may prosper” (v. 2).
 - a. Physically (for the man)
 - b. Spiritually (or the message)
 - c. Materially (for the mission)
2. John rejoices his son in the faith follows his example.
3. “Thou doest faithfully” (v. 5). “You do out of loyalty to God.”
4. “The church” (v. 6). The traveling preachers told the Church at Ephesus.
5. “Bring forward on their journey.” Provided financially.
6. “Fellow-helpers” (v. 8). To give money is to minister with them.
7. Gaius works with traveling ministers as God provided through his

church. D. DIOTREPHESES: A HURTFUL EGOTISTICAL FALSE TEACHER (vv. 9-11).

1. Name, Diotrephes means, “nourished by Jupiter”, not completely separated to God.
2. Gaius and Diotrephes pastored churches near each other.
3. The only threat John makes, “I will remember his deeds” (v. 10).
4. John wrote the church, Diotrephes probably destroyed the letter.
5. Diotrephes forgot, “In all things (Christ) should have the preeminence” (Col. 1:18).
Diotrephes wanted Christ’s place. He was a self-centered egoist.
Not unlike many successful pastors today.
 - Self-promotion can look like confidence
 - Willful defiance can look like conviction
 - Domineering can look like strong leadershipBut not if a John, or Gaius, are examples of leadership in a community.
6. Was Diotrephes a false teacher? Well let us look at the warning signs.
 - a. Loved himself first and foremost.
 - b. Not received the word from an apostle (rejected authority) to his church.
 - c. Personally rejected “receiveth not” (v. 9).
 - d. His works were evil. “Preaching against us with malicious words” (v. 10).
 - e. Shows hate rather than love.
 - f. Condemned by an apostle.
 - g. So Was he? I will let you decide.

7. Solution:

- a. "Don't follow evil" (v. 11). Negative role model of Diotrephes
- b. "Follow God" (v. 11) as in follow God not a man.

E. DEMETRUS: GENUINE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER (v. 12).

1. The perfect tense in the Greek language is used to show certainty.
2. We see Greek in KJV, "He that **doeth** good is of God" (v. 11). Not saying works righteousness. Living Faith brings forth fruit.
3. Consider: Are we good because we do good things? Do we do good things because we are have been 'remade' good?
4. Because Demetrus was made good by God (His Faith that he is justified in Christ - positionally in good standing before God),
5. From his Faith in finished work he did good (works). It is a process of Becoming in practice what you are ready in position. Not a process of earring your standing by good works.
6. Genuine Christian character begins with and follows from our justification. From the fountainhead of God's grace, we live a life of gratitude. A gratitude that flows from the knowledge of our sin and our unearned right standing before God.
7. Gratitude is the soil of all virtuous character.
8. Seek to embody Demetrus' example and not Diotrephes' example.

HERESIES ABOUT JESUS

0 - 500 AD

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use.

Jesus = fully human, not divine

1st C. AD
who was naturally born (i.e. not by virgin birth). He was not divine but was empowered by the Spirit of God. **≠ GOD**

Ebion? There is only one God, who is distinct from his chosen Messiah.

Jesus = divine, not human

1st-2nd C. AD

Unknown

2nd C. AD

Jesus = human, not eternally divine
Jesus was born human, united with God's spirit in his baptism, and adopted into God's being in his resurrection.

Theodotus of Byzantium?

There is only one pre-existent creator God. Therefore for Jesus to be God, he had to *become* divine.

GOD

2nd

C. AD

Jesus = divine mode, not human person
The Father, Son and Spirit are not three discrete persons, but are three modes or aspects of the one God.

FATHER OR OR

Unknown

Jesus only seemed to be human in his incarnation, suffering and death.

God cannot suffer or be corrupted by human flesh and therefore the divine Jesus could not be truly human.

There is only one God. God can only be three persons in appearance, not in actuality.

GOD

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4th C. AD
Apollinaris the Younger

Jesus' human spirit / soul was replaced by the divine 'logos' (the Word) in his incarnation. **LOGOS HUMAN SPIRIT**

Jesus could not sin and so could not have a human spirit, i.e. the source of human sin.

4th C. AD
Arius

Jesus = divine, but not fully human

Jesus = human, not divine The 'Logos' (the Word) was 'the firstborn' of creation, taking on human flesh in the incarnation. 'There was a time when the Son was not.'

The divine and transcendent Creator cannot share his being with another. Therefore Jesus must have been created. **LOGOS ≠ GOD**

4-5th C. AD

Jesus = divine, not human

Jesus has only one nature: divine. Jesus' human nature was virtually absorbed by his divinity in his incarnation, leaving only a 'cladding' of humanity. **GOD HUMANITY**

Euthyches Jesus is incorruptable and so could not be truly human.

Jesus = divine and human (but separate)

5th C. AD

Jesus' divine and human natures were completely separate in the incarnation. Mary was the 'Christ-bearer', not the 'God-bearer'. **HUMAN SPIRIT GOD**

Nestorius The divine and human natures cannot be mixed.

timeframe teacher big idea argument