

Jude 20-23

7 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.

The Need of the Hour...Discernment

Acts 20...25 “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For **I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.** 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. 32 **And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.**

2 Corinthians 11:1-4...I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me. 2 For **I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.** 3 **But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.** 4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully.

“God had jealously guarded His people Israel from the deceitfulness of deceivers who sought to draw their affections away from Himself (cf. Hos. 2:19-20; 4:12; 6:4; 11:8). Paul felt the same concern for the Corinthians.

His jealousy was in that sense “godly” (God-like). Paul pictured himself as the father of a virgin bride (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15; 2 Cor. 12:14). His desire was to keep his daughter, the Corinthian church, pure until she would consummate her marriage to Christ (cf. 4:14; Eph. 5:27; 1 John 3:2-3)."

Tom Constable Notes

1 Thessalonians 5:20-22...do not despise prophetic utterances. 21 But **examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.**

“There appears to have been a tendency in the Thessalonian church to despise prophetic utterances (i.e., the announcing of some word from God; cf. 1 Cor. 14:1). Paul warned against regarding these words from God as only words from men. However, he also counseled that his readers should test these utterances. They could do this by comparing what the speaker said with the standard of previously given divine revelation (cf. Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20; 1 John 4:1-3). Their neighbors, the Bereans, set them a good example in this respect (cf. Acts 17:11). They should retain everything that passed the test. What did not they should reject along with all other kinds of evil. The problem was discerning true prophecies and true prophets from false prophecies and false prophets (cf. 2 Thess. 2:1-3, 15), not discerning the true elements from the false elements in a true prophet’s prophecy.”

R. Fowler White, “Does God Speak Today Apart from the Bible? in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, p. 85.

Hebrews 5:11-14...Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. **12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and **you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.**

“Evidently the original readers had begun to let their minds wander as they heard the same things repeatedly. Rather than listening carefully, hearing completely, and comprehending clearly, they had become mentally and spiritually dull in their hearing.

They were not slow learners but had allowed themselves to grow lazy. A spiritual callus was growing over their ears.”

Tom Constable Notes

BEING ‘AGAINST HERESIES’ IS NOT ENOUGH

Excerpt from Martin Downes’ Risking the Truth

In Revelation 2 Jesus commands the church at Ephesus for their willingness to act in the face of error. They have shown discernment over the difference between true and false apostles, and having tested them they have actively rejected the false. Because of this they receive approving words from the glorified Son of God.

Whether or not churches today think this kind of discernment is a good thing is besides the point. Doubtless there is far too much confusion about the godliness, or not, of discernment, and far too much latitude when it comes to tolerating malevolent theologies.

It is possible to find ourselves clashing with Jesus because we weakly accept that He wants to be tested and rejected by churches. And of course the fact ought not to be lost on us that there are no false teachings, that are a clear and present danger to the churches, without there also being false teachers promoting them. Therefore ***there can be no exercise of discernment by churches without actively opposing those in error.***

It is worth bearing in mind that there will be those who accept false teaching because they are sincerely ignorant, or guilty of sincere misinterpretation of what Scripture actually teaches. Damage is still inflicted on the church's health when this happens. The treatment for this is the persuasive power of the Word of God rightly understood. After all, isn't one of the functions of Scripture to correct as well as to teach?

Nonetheless not everyone proves responsive. Which is why Scripture specifies a fair hearing, a fair warning, and a fair rejection of a man who embraces error as spiritually aberrant in his message and his character. ***By testing, the church at Ephesus had found those who were rejects in the eyes of Jesus because they were ‘false apostles’. This surely is good orthopraxy.***

Keep yourselves in the love of God. Protect yourself from anything that would draw you away from God the Father, trusting that in His love He has

sanctified you and is preserving you (vv. 1,24). **How to do this is succinctly explained with three participles...building up yourselves on your most holy faith.** Growing in understanding and love of the truths given us by God (v. 3)—the opposite of following false teaching (v. 18). **praying in the Holy Ghost.**

Regularly talking with the Father by the knowledge and assurance given by the Spirit through Christ (Eph. 6:18; cf. Gal. 4:6)—the opposite of being devoid of the Spirit (v. 19). **looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Anticipating with great hope the grace to be experienced when the Lord returns to give us *eternal life* in its full glory (2 Tim. 1:18)—the opposite of living for this world (v. 18). **Note how these verses reflect the Trinity; knowing God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is extremely practical in Christian spirituality (Eph. 2:18; 3:14–17).**

Have compassion on people who are in spiritual danger, and save them if possible from the fire of hell (v. 7). **Contending for the faith (v. 3) requires us to have compassion for the lost, especially for those in the church in danger of apostasy.** making a difference. Could be understood as “contending” (v. 9; Acts 11:2), “exercising discernment” (Matt. 16:3; 1 Cor. 11:29), or “those who waver in doubt,” the persons on whom we must have compassion (Matt. 21:21; James 1:6). *hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.* Old Testament language for avoiding ceremonial contamination (Lev. 15:17), here applied to the care needed to avoid becoming polluted by the error or sin of others (1 Cor. 10:14; 2 Cor. 6:17).

Whatever impression we have of these things among ourselves, which at times is as unsettling as watching the wind and the waves, **we are called here to look upward to the assessment of Jesus.** There may not be a place in our contemporary church culture and publications for the ‘top 50 discerning churches’, but these things do matter to the Son of God. We may not have peer approval, we may be frowned upon for an unloving stance, what does it matter though if He approves of us?

Jesus commends discernment. That is of great worth to churches seeking to honor His truth. If you find yourself in this situation it will put strength and heart into you to know that you have His approval.

As Bonar put it:

Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not;
The Master praises: what are men?

Not only is this so, but the church at Ephesus is also found to be persevering, hard working, willing to endure for Christ's name, and all without weariness. In a culture of ease and compromise here are dimensions of church life the very existence of which we ought to be deeply thankful for.

But it is not enough. ***Being discerning is not enough. Being against heresies is not enough. Being hardworking, persevering, and enduring is not enough.*** Even such commendable churches can be doomed. Even they can find that Jesus is going to bring them to an end. ***Such churches can have lost their first love.***

Don Carson summarizes this so well:

"If this church does not repent, it is doomed. The destruction might take two or three generations; it might take longer. But sooner or later the candlestick is removed; sooner or later the church that no longer finds obedience to the first and second great commandments a delight is sinking into the mire of idolatry and self-love—regardless of how orthodox, active, and zealous it is.

Here is our first duty, our fundamental privilege, our basic worship: to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. In the midst of suffering, persecution, disability, disappointment, infirmity, tiredness, duty, discipline, work, witness, discernment—in short in the midst of everything—that love remains our first duty, our fundamental privilege, our basic worship still.

When we grow old and calamitously weak, we must love God still; when we look after the chronically ill and think that our horizons are shriveling up, we must love God still; when we are bereaved, we must love God still; when we study and work and build and witness, we must love God still; when we exercise theological discernment, we must love God still.

And still, too, must we love our neighbor as ourselves.
So we have returned to love in hard places, the first of the hard places—the hard places of our own hearts, our own souls."
D. A. Carson, Love in Hard Places, p. 185-6

Excerpt From: Martin Downes. "Risking the Truth." Apple Books. <https://books.apple.com/us/book/risking-the-truth/id584345634>

Keep watch over your own soul and cultivate communion with the Triune God

“The contrast Jude introduced with “But” distinguishes Jude’s readers from the false teachers. **Since we are God’s temples under attack by hostile enemy forces, we need to build ourselves up, to strengthen ourselves spiritually** (cf. 1 Cor. 3:9-17; Eph. 2:20-22; 2 Pet. 3:18).

The best thing believers can do to withstand the malady is to develop their spiritual immunological resources.”

Tom Constable Notes

Jude 20,21...The main idea... “Keep yourselves in the love of God”...an imperative (“Keep yourselves in the sphere of God’s love”)

Keep yourselves in the love of God. Protect yourself from anything that would draw you away from God the Father, trusting that in His love He has sanctified you and is preserving you (vv. 1,24). **How to do this is succinctly explained with three participles.** *Building up yourselves on your most holy faith.* Growing in understanding and love of the truths given us by God (v. 3)—the opposite of following false teaching (v. 18). *Praying in the Holy Ghost.* Regularly talking with the Father by the knowledge and assurance given by the Spirit through Christ (Eph. 6:18; cf. Gal. 4:6)—the opposite of being devoid of the Spirit (v. 19). *Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Anticipating with great hope the grace to be experienced when the Lord returns to give us *eternal life* in its full glory (2 Tim. 1:18)—the opposite of living for this world (v. 18). Note how these verses reflect the Trinity; knowing God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is extremely practical in Christian spirituality (Eph. 2:18; 3:14–17).

Protect yourself from anything that would draw you away from God the Father, trusting that in His love He has sanctified you and is preserving you (vv. 1,24). How to do this is succinctly explained with three participles

Notes courtesy of Joel Beeke & Michael Barrett

Jude 1... Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are **the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ**

Jude 24... **Now to Him who is able to keep you** from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy

John 15:8-11...My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. **9** Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; **abide in My love.** **10** If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. **11** These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.

Three participles...

- **Building yourselves up on your most holy faith...*Growing in understanding and love of the truths given us by God (v. 3)—the opposite of following false teaching (v. 18)***

Jude 3... Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

Jude 18... that they were saying to you, “In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.”

1 Peter 2:1-3...Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, **2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,** **3** if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

2 Timothy 3:12-17...Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. **13** But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. **14** You, however, **continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of**, knowing from whom you have learned them, **15** and that from childhood you have known **the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.** **16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;** **17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.**

Colossians 2:6,7...Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, **7 having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.**

- **Praying in the Holy Spirit...Regularly talking with the Father by the knowledge and assurance given by the Spirit through Christ** (Eph. 6:18; cf. Gal. 4:6)—the opposite of being devoid of the Spirit (v. 19)

Ephesians 6:18... With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints

Galatians 4:6... Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

Romans 8:26,27...In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; **27** and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*.

- **Waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life...Anticipating with great hope the grace to be experienced when the Lord returns to give us eternal life in its full glory** (2 Tim. 1:18)—the opposite of living for this world (v. 18).

2 Timothy 1:18... the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day—and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus.

Jude 18... that they were saying to you, “In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.”

1 Thessalonians 1:9,10...For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, **10** and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

Titus 2:11-14...For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, **12** instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, **13** looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, **14** who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

1 John 3:2,3...Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. **3** And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Note how these verses reflect the Trinity; knowing God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is extremely practical in Christian spirituality (Eph. 2:18; 3:14–17)

Ephesians 2:18... for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Ephesians 3:14... For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love

In summary...“The Christian life is viewed as having an inward look relating to the development of character [v. 20], an upward look relating to communion with God [vv. 20-21], and a forward look being consummated in final glorification [v. 21].”

Tom Constable Notes

Jude 22,23...“**The weak and the willful**” (Matthew Henry)...

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

The Confused...Those who doubt, the wavering

And have mercy on **those who waver**...NET Bible translation

“Jude’s readers should tenderly help those of their fellow believers who were struggling and perhaps stumbling under the influence of the false teachers. Those in view are earnest doubters who sincerely cannot decide between truth and error. They are wavering in their loyalty. We should not abandon these brethren but compassionately seek to restore them.”

Tom Constable Notes

The Convinced...Those in great danger

James 5:19-20...My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, **20** let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

“It was easy then, and is now, to be led astray from Christ, who is the Truth.”

A T Robertson

The Committed...Those who pose real danger to others

Have compassion on people who are in spiritual danger, and *save them* if possible from the *fire* of hell (v. 7). Contending for the faith (v. 3) requires us to have compassion for the lost, especially for those in the church in danger of apostasy. *Making a difference*. Could be understood as “contending” (v. 9; Acts 11:2), “exercising discernment” (Matt. 16:3; 1 Cor. 11:29), or “those who waver in doubt,” the persons on whom we must have compassion (Matt. 21:21; James 1:6).

Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Old Testament language for avoiding ceremonial contamination (Lev. 15:17), here applied to the care needed to avoid becoming polluted by the error or sin of others (1 Cor. 10:14; 2 Cor. 6:17).

“In the case of those whom heresy has completely swept away, we should have pity on them rather than condemning them without compassion. Moreover we should regard them with fear, not fear of being infected by physical contact with them, but fear of falling under God’s displeasure and discipline if we embrace their error. We should avoid any contact with these people because of the corrupting influence they can have on us through their words and actions (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:14-15). The “garment” stands for those things affected by contact with fleshly behavior such as personal habits and practices, speech, companions, and the like.”

Tom Constable Notes

MINISTRY AMONG SHEEP AND WOLVES

Martin Downes' Interview with Joel Beeke

DOWNES: Have you ever been drawn toward any views or movements that time has shown to have been unhelpful or even dangerous theologically?

BEEKE: By the grace of God, no.

DOWNES: How should a minister keep his own heart, mind and will from theological error?

BEEKE: Keep yourself deeply immersed in the Scriptures, and pray daily to be willing to surrender all to their inerrant truth.

Surround yourself with sound, godly colleagues and lay people who love you sufficiently to be honest with you, so that iron will sharpen iron.

Read the best, sound, scriptural, classic books, especially those by the Reformers and Puritans, that address your mind with clarity, convict your conscience with poignancy, bend your will with conviction, and move your feet with passion. Meditate on those truths preached that do your people the most good; in every case, you will discover that they are biblical truths.

Develop the hide of a rhinoceros so that you won't be tossed about with every criticism and wind of doctrine while maintaining the heart of a child, so that you will be a tender undershepherd to the needy.

DOWNES: Calvin said that ministers have two voices. One is for the sheep and the other for warding off the wolves. How have you struck the right balance in this regard in your pulpit ministry?

BEEKE: I suppose that one can never be absolutely certain that he is striking the right balance on this critical subject, but here are four guidelines that I find helpful...

1. Pray daily for biblical balance in all areas of ministry.
2. Love your sheep. Love has a way of balancing out our often imbalanced personalities. Those in error can receive much more from a minister who obviously loves them than from one who comes across as combative.
3. Be patient with your sheep. Be willing to teach them the same truth repeatedly, just as the Lord has done with you (cf. Phil. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:1–2).
4. Let your ‘voice for the sheep’ always receive the primary accent of your ministry. Truth must ultimately be positive in nature to win the day with a congregation. Many ministers have focused too much on polemical and apologetical theology, often setting up and beating upon straw men in their congregation to the detriment of the flock. Polemics and apologetics must have the proper place of a minor accent in the ministry, so that no error is left unexposed.

But the minister must expose error wisely, forthrightly, humbly, compellingly, not by lording it over the sheep (2 Tim. 4:1–2; 1 Pet. 5:2–3).

DOWNES: Why do old heresies persist today? Why do men possessed of fine intellectual gifts end up embracing and believing significant theological errors? BEEKE: Heresy is the product of the mind of ‘the natural man’, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 2:14, that is, ‘the unrenewed man’ (Charles Hodge), who must necessarily receive and understand Christian truth without the illumination of the Holy Spirit and without a renewed mind.

As a stranger to ‘the wisdom of God’ revealed in the gospel, he must also consult and depend on ‘the wisdom of this world’ (1 Cor. 1:19–24). Compounding the problem is the vanity of his mind, his darkened understanding, his ignorance and blindness of heart (Eph. 4:17–18). Such a man can have at best only a shallow, imperfect, distorted view of the truth, and it is not surprising that he conceives and propagates a multitude of errors and falsehoods.

The root of our English word ‘heresy’ is the Greek word *hairesis*, meaning ‘choice’ or ‘opinion’. Note that the word implies the activity of both the mind and the will of man. Having come to a misunderstanding of the truth or having concocted or embraced a falsehood in its place, the natural man cleaves to his errors and zealously asserts and advances them precisely because they are his own opinions.

Nor is it surprising that when a false prophet or teacher begins to proclaim his erroneous views to others, there are many willing to receive and embrace them. Fallen men are hostile to the truth of God and prefer to believe a falsehood rather than submit to that truth. The wonder is not that there are many heretics, but that there are not many, many more.

Because the mind of the natural man is finite, there are only so many erroneous or heretical views it can conceive or embrace. Because that mind is corrupt and the corruption is inherited by succeeding generations, there is a tendency to resurrect or reproduce the errors of the past. After 2000 years, it is only to be expected that the errors and heresies of the present day all seem to have their historical antecedents, often reaching back to the earliest history and experience of the ancient church.

Ignorance always serves the cause of error. Christians who do not know what the Bible says and have no knowledge of the history of Christian doctrine find themselves unequipped to detect and refute these resurrected errors and heresies of the past. As a result, it is all too easy for false teachers ‘to creep in unawares’ (Jude 4) and launch campaigns to subvert congregations and denominations that historically embraced the apostolic Christian faith.

In America, wealth and business acumen have also been called upon to advance some of the most ancient and obvious falsehoods and errors. The Church of Latter Day Saints, better known as ‘the Mormons’, is a huge and highly profitable

business enterprise devoted to promoting polytheism on a scale that rivals Hinduism, a ‘gospel’ of salvation by works righteousness, continuing revelation, ‘baptism for the dead’, ‘eternal marriage’, and a secret temple cultus modeled on Free Masonry.

Finally, we must reckon with the activity of Satan as ‘the father of lies’ (John 8:44). Wherever men call into question the truth and trustworthiness of God’s Word, handle the Word of God deceitfully, and love and make a lie as a substitute for the truth of God’s Word, we can see the hand of the enemy of souls at work.

DOWNES: How can a minister discern between those who are thinking their way through doctrines on the way to greater depth and clarity, and those who are questioning doctrines in a way that could lead to significant error?

BEEKE: First of all, we must follow the example of Christ and the apostles, who openly invited and urged their hearers to prove or test the truth and worth of what they proclaimed and taught. Reformed Christians have asserted and maintained the liberty of the Christian and the liberty of conscience. ‘The requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also’ (Westminster Confession of Faith, 20.2).

Every minister must learn to defend the faith without being defensive or combative. ‘The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves’ (2 Tim. 2:24, 25a).

We should encourage our people to ‘prove all things’ (1 Thess. 5:21). Rather than rebuking someone for asking questions, we should devote our energy to finding answers to those questions from God’s Word. The Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions, and the vast theological literature connected with them, are also great helps to a right understanding of faith and practice.

On the other hand, as those who watch for the souls of God’s people, we must be alert to any sign of straying from the truth. We must warn against embracing any notion or doctrine that requires one to set aside the clear testimony of Scripture. We must resist efforts to reinterpret Scripture in order to accommodate sinful practices or lifestyles. We must expose the sinful tendency of the fallen man to exalt himself and make himself a judge of God’s Word, rather than submitting to its judgment.

We must use discernment. A true Christian will gladly receive faithful instruction from the Word of God. A man who is merely dabbling in theology or looking for an intellectual sparring partner deserves to be rebuked.

And ‘a man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself’ (Titus 3:10–11).

DOWNES: What would you consider to be the main theological dangers confronting us today, and how can we deal with them?

BEEKE: Some dangers have been with us for a long time, and some are just beginning to loom on the horizon. ‘The Battle for the Bible’ has been with us for more than one hundred years, and it has proven to be a great setback for the cause of Christ in the world. The apostasy of the Protestant churches in Europe and Great Britain; the disorder and corruption of evangelical churches in North America; the extension of much of that disorder and corruption to newly planted churches in Latin America, Africa, and Asia; the resilience of corrupt bodies such as the Church of Rome, and the sway it holds over so many millions; the propagation of cults of many kinds – all this may be attributed in very large measure to ignorance, false views, and rank unbelief concerning the unique character, content, and authority of Holy Scripture as God’s written Word.

In the community of Reformed churches, we must deplore the rise of what can be called ‘boutique’ versions of the Reformed faith: little groups centered around some novel “idea or practice, such as paedocommunion, that sets them apart from other Reformed Christians. Equally distressing is the widespread defection from the faithful observance of the Second Commandment regarding the regulation of the content and manner of Christian worship; many Reformed Christians have forgotten that the Reformers were as much concerned to regulate Christian worship according to Scripture as they were determined to establish Christian doctrine from the Word of God. Rightly understood and practiced, Christian worship is profoundly theological, spiritual and practical.

Nothing, however, is more astonishing than contemporary denials or disclaimers concerning faith as the sole instrument of our justification before God. Nothing was more basic to the Reformation, and nothing is more essential to the gospel, than justification by faith alone. Scripture acknowledges only one way of salvation, and it has nothing to do with covenant status, church membership, sacramental administration, Christian education, or progressive sanctification to acquire salvation. ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved’ (Acts 16:31).

Almost as disturbing is the rise of the ‘postmodern’ school of thought or mind-set, and the inroads it is making among Christians in North America. As the name implies, postmodernism is a reaction to the modernism so dominant in Europe and America in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first

decades of the twentieth. One would think this rejection of modernism would work in favor of the historic Christian faith, but that is not the direction postmodernism has taken. Fundamental to postmodernism is the rejection of rational systems of thought and any kind of meta-narrative.

Reformed Christianity has a rational system of thought, summarized in its historic creeds and confessions; its meta-narrative is nothing less than the witness of Holy Scripture to the history of redemption in Christ, and its summary in the gospel.”

It is open to question whether there is any such thing as postmodernism, at least anything that can be expressed in positive terms. Even so, there are many important self-identified postmodern thinkers, writers and shapers of popular culture. Their blend of radical skepticism, unbelief, eclecticism and nihilism is making its impact on our world and the people to whom we must preach the gospel. It must also be admitted that these trends in the culture around us often have a profound and often destructive impact on the Christian church.

We ministers should be alert to the ways in which the young people in our own churches, much more attuned to and involved in popular culture than we may like to think, may be embracing the stances and ways of postmodernism.

Knowledge is power, and we need to know and understand the world we live in and the churches we serve. Even more important, we need to grow in our knowledge and practice of the things taught and commanded in Holy Scripture. The man who knows the Scriptures well is ‘throughly furnished unto all good works’ (2 Tim. 3:16), including in particular the good work of proclaiming the great truths of the Christian faith, wielding God’s Word as a mighty spiritual weapon, ‘casting down imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God’ (2 Cor. 10:5) – in order to save both himself and his hearers and to build up the church of Christ unto all generations.”

In sum, here are three short guidelines:

1. Become and stay well versed in the Scriptures, in confessional Reformed theology, and in the great classics of Reformed, experiential theology.
2. Summarize the errors of various movements succinctly from the pulpit when the scriptural text you are expounding pertains to them. Enlarge upon your exposure of error, perhaps, in catechism classes (because young people are the church’s future) or weekday classes (because those who attend have, in general, greater appreciation for apologetics than does your average Sabbath attendee and because your teaching situation is less formal).

3. Remember that you cannot study every false movement in depth, nor should you. Study in depth for yourself those that directly affect your congregation. Otherwise, read the best book from an evangelical perspective that refutes a particular error. In some cases, reading one good article may suffice.”

Younger ministers should beware of being so caught up with the trends, debates, and crises of the present that they neglect to reinforce their knowledge of Christian history and Christian doctrine. It is important that they know what they are up against in terms of the challenges of today, but it is even more important that they know precisely what the Christian faith is at its roots, what the authentic gospel of Jesus Christ is, and how it is to be proclaimed, according to its Author. God does not change, His Word cannot change, His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting, and His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

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