

A FIELD GUIDE ON



**FALSE
TEACHING**

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Introduction	1
Being Prepared to Make a Defense	11
I. FALSE TEACHING	
The Prosperity Gospel	25
Deism	41
Legalism and Antinomianism	57
II. CULTS	
Mormonism	81
Christian Science	97
Jehovah's Witnesses	111
III. FALSE RELIGIONS AND WORLDVIEWS	
Buddhism	135
Hinduism	151
Islam	169
New Age Spirituality	189
Atheism and Secularism	205
Conclusion	227
Notes	233
Bibliography	239

INTRODUCTION

With just over 30 percent of the world's population professing to be Christians as of 2017, Christianity is the largest and most widespread religion in the world.¹ However, there exists an astonishingly wide diversity of opinions about doctrine and practice under the umbrella of Christianity.² While many professing Christians have an accurate understanding of the theology of Scripture, not all professing Christians understand the core biblical doctrines of the faith as summarized in the classic Christian creeds and confessions, and many of those who claim to follow Jesus hold beliefs that deny biblical teaching. Moreover, Christians must interact daily with people at work and in their communities who make no Christian profession and perhaps even challenge the Bible's teaching.

False teaching—both inside and outside the church—has always been proclaimed against the truth of Scripture. It is therefore essential that believers be well versed in the biblical doctrines of revelation, God, man, sin, Christ, atonement, salvation, and eternity. Believers should also seek to be conversant with the essential features of false teaching, religions, and worldviews so that they can recognize error and refute it for the sake of the gospel. To that end, this work is an introduction to current false teachings in the church and false religions in the world. It is not an exhaustive survey, but rather it seeks to point out many of the false teachings in our day. It is our sincere desire that this booklet will help you be better “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

Essential Christian truths

Although everything God reveals in the Scriptures may be considered “essential” to the life of the church, some biblical doctrines are more important to the system of Christian truth than others. When considering false teaching and religions,

the following biblical doctrines are vital to maintaining Christianity as it was given to us by Jesus and the Apostles.

Revelation

Theologians refer to God's revelation of Himself in creation and the human conscience as general revelation and to His revelation in Scripture as special revelation. General revelation discloses God's eternal power and divine nature as well as His basic moral law for humanity (Ps. 19:1–6; Rom. 1:18–2:16). Special revelation gives us God's fuller revelation of His character, His plan of salvation for mankind, and His instructions for living lives that please Him (Ps. 19:7–11; 2 Tim. 3:16–17). The Old and New Testaments are the full and final special revelation of God. With the sixty-six books of the Bible, God has given us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). The Scriptures are infallible and inerrant. All that God has revealed in His Word is authoritative, sufficient, clear, and necessary for the salvation of believers, the lives of Christians, and the ministry of the church. The central message of Scripture is God's salvation in the person and work of Christ (Luke 24:27, 44).

There is no other special revelation from God after the close of the canon of Scripture.

God

The starting place of all truth is the holy God Himself. When we look into Scripture, we discover that the one true and living God is infinite (1 Kings 8:27; Ps. 147:5), eternal (Ps. 90:1; Isa. 57:15), and unchangeable (Mal. 3:6) in all His divine perfections (Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:31; Ps. 86:5, 15; Joel 2:13). Within the one Godhead there subsist three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three persons are the one true and living God. The Father, Son, and Spirit are the same in substance and equal in power and glory. God is the Holy Trinity.

Man

At creation, God made humanity male and female, in His own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Gen. 1:26–27; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). God commissioned men and women to fill the earth and have dominion over it (Gen. 1:28). He entered into a covenant of works with Adam

at creation, forbidding him to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, promising life upon obedience and death upon disobedience (Gen. 2:15–17; Rom. 5:12–21). This prohibition to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was meant both to test Adam’s obedience and to remind him that God is the Creator and man the creature.

Sin

When Adam disobeyed God and ate of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he fell from the condition in which God originally made him. By his disobedience, Adam brought sin and death into the world. Adam stood as the representative of all his descendants, so that everyone who descends from him by natural generation sinned in him and fell with him (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22). Adam’s natural-born descendants have had his guilt imputed to them, have been deprived of the original righteousness that Adam possessed, and have had the corruption of his nature passed on to them. By nature, all people (except Christ) are “dead in . . . trespasses and sins” and under the wrath and curse of God (Eph. 2:1–3). Actual sins that we

commit proceed from the corruption of our nature and are transgressions of the law of God or failures to keep His law. As the Apostle John wrote, “Sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).

Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God and second person of the Trinity, became incarnate in the fullness of time, adding a human nature to Himself and thus uniting Himself to our humanity. Jesus is truly God and truly man in one person forever. Jesus is the only Mediator between God and man. He lived a sinless life in order to fulfill the demands of the law of God (Rom. 5:12–21; Gal. 4:3–4), and He laid down His life as an atoning sacrifice for His sheep (John 10:15). In His death, Jesus propitiated—satisfied and turned away—the wrath of God by taking the punishment for the sins of His people. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. He ascended to heaven, where He is seated “at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3). Jesus will come again in glory to consummate all things and judge the living and the dead. His rule as King of the kingdom of God will never end.

Salvation

Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone. God chose a people for Himself in His Son before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3–4). The Son lived and died to atone for the sins of those whom God has chosen (John 10:29). The salvation that Christ accomplished by His death and resurrection is applied to His people by the Holy Spirit of God, the third person of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit regenerates those for whom Christ died, bringing them from death to life (John 3:5). All those who are born again by the Spirit of God come to trust in Christ and are united to Him by faith alone. When a sinner is united to Christ by faith, he is justified, set apart, and adopted as a child of God. Everyone who is united to Christ will be glorified when he dies or when Christ comes again on the last day.

Eternity

The Bible teaches that there is a final day of judgment on which all people will stand before the throne of God and will have to give an account of everything they have done in

the body (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). The spirits of believers who die before that final day will go to be with Christ in heaven, whereas the spirits of those who have not trusted in Christ and who die before that final day will suffer in hell (Mark 9:45; Luke 12:5; 16:19–31; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23). The bodies of both believers and unbelievers who die before the final day of judgment will remain in the grave, awaiting the final bodily resurrection on judgment day (Acts 24:15). On the last day, when Christ returns, all those who have died before His coming will be raised. All those who have trusted in Christ will receive glorified bodies, united to their spirits, and will go to be with Him in glory forever, dwelling with Him in the new heaven and earth. Everyone who has not trusted in Jesus alone for salvation will perish eternally in the lake of fire (John 3:36; 1 Cor. 15:35–57; Rev. 20–21).

BEING PREPARED TO MAKE A DEFENSE

Defending the faith

God instructs believers to always be “prepared to make a defense [Greek *apologia*] to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Apologetics involves giving people a well-reasoned statement or defense; it is a verbal and rational defense of the Christian faith. In order for us to give an effective defense of the truth, we first and foremost must be well versed in Scripture. Defending the truth of God’s Word against falsehoods and lies is an integral part of the Christian’s life and service. To do so effectively, we must also be prepared to defend the truth

against false teachings and practices that run counter to the truth of Scripture.

In addition to giving a verbal reasoned defense of the truth of Scripture, Christians are to give a defense of the truth in the way we live and act. The Christian's witness to the truth often comes in response to the world's observation of how the faith is worked out in the Christian's life. Peter introduced an ethical dimension to the command to defend the faith. He exhorted believers to give a defense "with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). Our lives serve as a defense of the truth. Jesus taught His disciples, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). The Apostle Paul charged believers to commit to "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). This is a key element of defending the faith. The manner in which we speak the truth is a vital aspect of our defense of the truth. This is important both for pastors and for laypeople. As the Apostle Paul wrote Timothy, "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach . . . correcting his opponents with gentleness" (2 Tim. 2:24).

Contending for the faith

In addition to being called to defend the faith, Christians are to proactively “contend for the faith” (Jude 3). The church is to be proactive in the advancement of the truth of the Christian faith by exposing, refuting, rebuking, and correcting theological error (Eph. 5:11; 2 Tim. 2:25; Titus 1:13; 2:15). This is seen in the way that Paul interacted with the false teachings and ideologies represented in Athens (Acts 17:16–34). Ministers especially are given a responsibility to contend for the truth on behalf of the members of the church. This includes exposing false teaching and false living that contradict the truth. Paul instructs Titus to rebuke those whose lives contradict the gospel so “that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13). He also referred to those who “profess to know God, but they deny him by their works” (v. 16). The Apostle John charged the church not to give someone an opportunity to spread false teaching among the Christian community (2 John 9–11). Paul charged the elders in Ephesus to be alert to the fact that men would arise from among them “speaking twisted things, to

draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). This call to contend for the faith is a common theme in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 1:3–4; 2 Tim. 1:13; Titus 3:9).

Proclaiming the faith

Inasmuch as God has appointed pastors to guard the truth (2 Tim. 1:14), the preaching of the Word of God is the primary means of the defense and preservation of the truth. God has instituted the preaching of the gospel as the central means by which He advances His kingdom (Rom. 10:14–17; 1 Cor. 1:21). The preaching of the Word is also the central means of correcting error and false teaching. Paul charged Timothy: “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Tim. 4:2–4).

Though not all are called and gifted to preach and teach in the church, all the members of the church are called

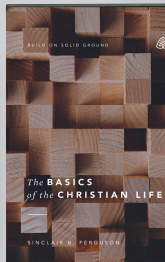
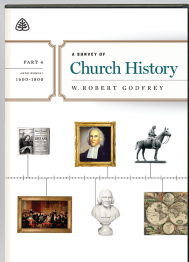
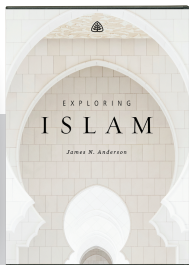
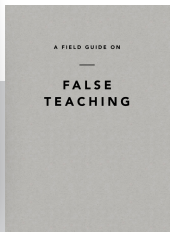
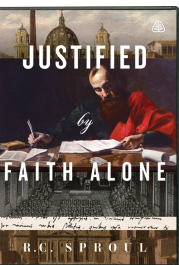
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IN YOUR HEARTS
HONOR CHRIST
THE LORD AS HOLY,
ALWAYS BEING
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1 PETER 3:15

by God to be faithful in the propagation of His Word in their daily interactions with others. As Paul commended the members of the church in Thessalonica, “For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you . . . but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere” (1 Thess. 1:8). As ministers faithfully proclaim the truth of God’s Word, believers will be better equipped to faithfully carry the truth of Scripture out into their everyday relationships. To that end, it is our hope that each section of this work will serve as an aid to both pastors and congregants who desire to be faithful in their defense and proclamation of the Christian faith.

We want to see men and women
around the world connect the deep truths
of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

RECOGNIZING ERROR AND RESPONDING WITH THE TRUTH

How do you know if someone is telling the truth about God?
And how should you respond if they are not?

Every Christian is responsible for knowing God's Word and sharing it with others. But in a world affected by sin, false teaching is everywhere. Many people obscure, distort, or challenge what God has revealed in Scripture—even some leaders in the church. To be better prepared as witnesses for Christ, we must identify falsehood and the devastating harm it brings.

By surveying prominent theological errors, cults, and world religions, this book can equip you to defend your faith against the dangers of false teaching. It can also help you more effectively respond to your friends, family, and neighbors with the hope you have in Christ.



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