

How Do We Earnestly Contend for the Truth?

An Exposition of Jude 3-4

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³ Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴ For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.¹

I. Introduction:

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to go ahead and in advance apologize for what I'm about to say since will not seem relevant to my expositional series titled, "*Earnestly Contend for the Truth as a Slave of Jesus Christ.*" So, I will try to make it quick, easy, and painless. Afterwards, we will then examine Jude verses 3-4. Afterwards, we will ask how we should then live in view of these two verses and offer a conclusion.

So before I begin my exposition I want to talk to you about a scientific report that crossed my desk.

While I'm no "tree hugger," we need to be biblical when comes to environmental issues because we are called to be good stewards of what God has given us. Thus, I think there needs to be some discussion regarding what a Christian view of the environment looks like. Well, one serious issue I need to bring up is a study that has observed that there is a colorless, odorless, tasteless chemical that is killing an uncounted amount of people every year. It is an invisible killer called Dihydrogen Monoxide, DHMO for short, and its systematic acidic name is hydric acid.

Now most deaths are caused by accidental inhalation of DHMO, but the dangers of DHMO do not end there. Prolonged exposure to its solid form causes severe tissue damage. Symptoms of DHMO ingestion can include excessive sweating and urination, and possibly a bloated feeling, nausea, vomiting and body electrolyte imbalance. For those who have become dependent, DHMO withdrawal means certain death.

DHMO:

- contributes to the "greenhouse effect."
- may cause severe burns.
- contributes to the erosion of our natural landscape.
- accelerates corrosion and rusting of many metals.
- may cause electrical failures and decreased effectiveness of automobile brakes.
- has been found in excised tumors of terminal cancer patients.

¹The New King James Version. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Jude 3-4.

What is also very alarming is that quantities of dihydrogen monoxide have been found in almost every stream, lake, and reservoir in America today. But the pollution is global, and the contaminant has even been found in Antarctic ice.

Despite the danger, dihydrogen monoxide is often used:

- as an industrial solvent and coolant.
- in nuclear power plants.
- in the production of styrofoam.
- as a fire retardant.
- in many forms of cruel animal research.
- in the distribution of pesticides.
- as an additive in certain "junk-foods" and other food products.

Even after washing, produce remains contaminated by this chemical. Companies dump DHMO into rivers and the ocean, and nothing can be done to stop them because this practice is still legal. The impact on wildlife is huge!

The American government, including the Bush Administration, has refused to ban the production, distribution, or use of this damaging chemical due to its "importance to the economic health of this nation." In fact, the navy and other military organizations are conducting experiments with DHMO, and designing multi-billion dollar devices to control and utilize it during warfare situations. Hundreds of military research facilities receive tons of it through a highly sophisticated underground distribution network. Many store large quantities for later use.

So, there it is ladies and gentlemen. Perhaps the best way to identify whether you are ingesting DHMO in what you eat, drink, and whether it is found in the products you use in your home on a daily basis, (e.g., shampoo, toothpaste, etc), the place where you work or in the activities you enjoy is to look for this symbol: **H₂O (H₂O = Water)**.

Transition:

- A. This environmental report is used to demonstrate our gullibility. If you were trained in chemistry, then perhaps you would not be as gullible you we might have been this evening with this environmental report.
- B. Gullibility exists, in part, because of a lack of knowledge. To be sure, other factors may contribute. There are certain people, who possess a certain personality that demands authority, attention, and respect. They are natural born leaders who easily foster a stream of followers...followers who blindly put their minds at the door. Then there are those who so skilled in rhetoric that they suppress the truth or obscure understanding of the truth in the lives of those who follow them. And then there are just those people who can convince others of some lie simply because they are good looking. People want to be identified with them even at the expense of the truth.
- C. In the same way we have churches, churches that are gullible, compromising in their distinctiveness because they are ignorant of doctrinal truth. Therefore, when false, heretical, and apostate teaching sneaks in, congregational members and even trained leaders fail to recognize it. To be fair, there are leaders who do recognize it, but fail to

have the courage to stand up for doctrinal truth -fearful of what it will cost them. And for some, the cost has been huge.

1. One gentleman I've personally known for many years, who became a senior pastor of a large Baptist church, stood up for doctrinal truth and within six months of his faithful ministry there he was fired and his family of four were left with a mortgage payment, emotional scars, and a broken heart. See, there were significant church members, who yielded a high degree of influence and power, who did not recognize their own historic Southern Baptist faith. Therefore, when they found out their pastor was an evangelical who embraced the reliability of Scripture they immediately went after him like a mob with hay forks and torches. I called him up just three weeks after being installed as pastor and he told me that already, unexpectedly, he had over forty people who are demanding his resignation.

- D. Regardless if it is a lack of content, i.e., they are ignorant of doctrinal truth, or because of a lack of courage, i.e., they know the truth but fail to act on it (for whatever reason), Christians who do not contend for the Christian faith disobey the instruction of Jude found in verses 3-4. The verses state:

“...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴ For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”²

- E. Let's now examine verses 3-4 more carefully. As we study these two verses I want you to consider these three questions:

1. What does Jude mean when he says that we are to contend for the Christian faith?
2. What is the Christian faith?
3. What is Jude's description of false teachers?

II. EXPOSITION OF JUDE 3-4:

- A. Instead of writing about the salvation they shared, Jude was compelled to give a warning.

“Dear friends, although I have been eager to write to you about our common salvation, I now feel compelled instead to write to encourage you to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. ⁴ For certain men have slipped in among you-... [NET]”

1. Our first observation is that circumstances motivated a change of topic. At first he was preparing to write about the salvation they share but when he finds out that they are facing a serious threat by the infiltration of false teachers, he changes the focus of his letter. Thus, verses 3-4 reveal the purpose of this letter.

²*The New King James Version.* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Jud 3-4.

2. Second observation: I want you to recognize Jude’s sensitivity and passion to minister to them in the very best way. Rather than being stubborn, Jude changes his focus order that he might best minister to them in view of their most pressing needs. He was planning to write an exposition of the content of the Christian gospel. However, Jude pursues what will best minister to them in view of their most pressing need.³ This is reflected in change between, “*although I have been eager to write to you about our common salvation*” which communicates that Jude was very eager, was making every effort to write about salvation to, “*I now feel compelled instead to write to encourage you to contend earnestly for the faith.*” He states, “I now feel compelled,” he communicates “necessity” or “urgency.”
3. See, a slave of Jesus Christ is ever so sensitive to the needs of others and will do what will best serve others, not themselves. So, a slave will change his or plans if the situation demands it.
4. Third observation of verse 3: What does Jude mean when he says “*contend earnestly for the faith*”? See, “*contend*” is an emphasized word.

Edmond Hieber states: "To 'contend earnestly for' (*epagonizesthai*) is an expressive compound infinitive which appears only here in the New Testament. The simple form of the verb (*agonizomai*), which appears as 'agonize' in its English form, was commonly used in connection with the Greek stadium to denote a strenuous struggle to overcome an opponent, as in a wrestling match. It was also used more generally of any conflict, contest, debate, or lawsuit. Involved is the thought of the expenditure of all one's energy in order to prevail."⁴

8. Tom Constable puts it this way: “This unique compound verb pictures a person taking his or her stand on top of something an adversary desires to take away, and fighting to defend and retain it.”⁵
9. So, we may summarize “*contend*” by stating that this strong word emphasizes, like a Greek athlete, the exertions of believers. It does not mean that we are simply to resist the false teacher’s perversion of doctrinal truth. Rather, we are to actively and energetically fight for it!⁶ In other words, sitting in the bleachers is insufficient; we have to contend!
9. So, in essence, Jude decides that a discourse in salvation is not what they need at this moment. Rather, what they need to do is what we call Christian Apologetics.

³ Richard J. Bauckman, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 50: Jude, 2 Peter (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 31.

⁴D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Exposition of Jude 3-4," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:566 (April-June 1985):144

⁵G. F. C. Fronmüller, "The Epistle General of Jude," in *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 12:5:13.

⁶ Douglas Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: 2 Jude, Peter*, 229.

10. Fourth observation: What does Jude mean when he says that we need to earnestly contend for the faith?
- a. The word, “*faith*” has several meanings in the N.T. Normally “*faith*” [*pistis*] refers to the act of believing like when we speak of an individual’s faith in Jesus Christ.” But here it refers to doctrinal content—what you believe.
 - b. Douglas Moo puts it this way: “Faith...has this objective meaning...describes what Christians believe—such things as Jesus’ atoning death and resurrection, the indwelling Holy Spirit, salvation by grace through faith, and (especially in Jude’s situation) the holy lifestyle that flows from God’s grace in Christ.”⁷
11. In fact, Jude expands what he means by referring to the “*faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.*”
- a. “The adverb ‘once for all’ [hapax]...seems to indicate that the doctrinal convictions of the early church has been substantially codified. That is to say, Jude could appeal to written documents of the Christian faith in his arguments with the false teachers. Most likely, the documents were the letters of Paul and perhaps one or more gospels. First and Second Peter may have also been among the documents Jude has in mind.”⁸
 - b. Notice something else: By stating “*that was once for all entrusted to the saints,*” Jude stresses a permanent and stable notion regarding the character or nature of the Christian faith. It is stable, normative, entrusted to the care of Christians.
 - c. Ladies and gentlemen: The Christian faith is in your care. Hold firmly to the faith you profess! (Heb. 4:14).
12. But before I do, I want to share with you Warren Wiersbe’s comments on verses 3-4:

He states, “I must confess that I sympathize with Jude. In my own ministry, I would much rather encourage the saints than declare war on the apostates. But when the enemy is in the field, the watchmen dare not go to sleep. The Christian life is a battleground, not a playground.”⁹

B. Why do they need “*contend for the faith*”? Let’s look at verse 4:

⁷ Mood, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 229.

⁸ *NET Bible*, 2302.

⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, "An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire 'BE' Series"--Jkt. (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989), Jud 3.

1. Because “**certain people**” have “*wormed their way in,*” have secretly slipped in among you. This word, “*secretly slipped in*” is the verb “*crept in*” (Gr. *pareisedusan*), “. . . indicates a secret, stealthy, and subtle insinuation of something evil into a society or a situation.”¹⁰
2. This infiltration was predicted by the O.T. prophets and the Apostles: 2 Peter 2:1 and the Apostle Paul in Acts 20:29-30. Even Jesus warned about “*wolves in sheep’s clothing*” in Matthew 5:17.
3. Though Jude does not state their names . . . though Jude does not number them, though Jude does not refer to their nationality, whether they are Jewish or Gentile, He immediately offers 4 characteristics of these wolves in sheep’s clothing.
 - a. Their “**condemnation was written about long ago.**” Though we might question what documents he was actually referring to, what we can say is that the condemnation about false teachers has long been established in God’s Word: Isa. 8:19-22; Jer. 5:13-14; 2 Thes. 2:6-10; 2 Peter 2:3.
 - b. “**They are godless men.**” The word “*godless*” [*asebes*] is one who is “*without religion,*” one who “*fails to worship*”. Interestingly, Hellenistic Jews used this word to refer to practical godlessness-ethical irreverence. In essence, they live an immoral lifestyle.
 - c. They “**change the grace of God into a license for immorality.**” They embraced antinomianism whereby they “*twisted God’s free forgiveness in Christ into an ‘open sesame’ for sinful behavior.*”¹¹ So, antinomians contend that because of grace we can live as we like. By using the term immorality they are emphasizing their fleshly sins: sexual misconduct, drunkenness, gluttony, etc.
 - d. Lastly, “**they deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.**” Well, how were they denying Jesus Christ?

"Although they claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, Jude says that by rejecting his moral demands they are in fact disowning him as their Master and repudiating his authority as Lord."¹² In essence, they were denying Jesus Christ by their behavior-living in opposition to what Jesus Christ demanded of his people. The term, “Master and Lord” refers to the same person [Granville Sharp Rule].

As Tom Constable states, “Doctrinal deviation often accompanies and often justifies ethical and moral sin.” Norman Geisler puts it this way:

¹⁰William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, p. 211.

¹¹ Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 230.

¹²Bauckham, p. 41.

“Not surprisingly, this perversion in practice was accompanied by a perversion in doctrine—a denial of the person and authority of **Jesus Christ**.¹³

4. So, in summary of verse 3-4 we might conclude our consideration of this verse this way: “The apostates, like the cultists today, use the Word of God to promote and defend their false doctrines. They seduce young, immature Christians who have not yet been grounded in the Scriptures. Every soldier of the Cross needs to go through “*basic training*” in a local church so that he knows how to use the weapons of spiritual warfare (2 Cor. 10:4–5).”¹⁴

III. How Should We Then Live?

Realizing that apostasy is also infiltrating our churches, often coming into our churches like a Trojan horse, how should we live?

- A. Be sensitive to the needs of others to the extent that you are willing to change your plans in order to best meet their needs.
- B. Realize the awesome privilege and responsibility in being entrusted with God’s instruction.
- C. People are not what they always appear to be. False teachers creep into our churches in stealth form.
- D. People act upon what they believe. Godless people, people twisting God’s grace into a license to sin, and people who practically denying Christ by living in a manner that is contrary to their teaching, is a reminder that you need to be able to earnestly contend for the Christian faith.
- E. Actively contend for doctrinal truth like an athlete competes in an Olympic Game. It is insufficient to only resist false teaching. We must learn how to proactively refute it.
- F. Regardless of our position as church members, each of us needs to earnestly contend for the Christian faith. But what does that look like? In other words, what are distinctive qualities of those who are contending for the faith? Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to explore what this means negatively, then positively.

I would suggest that those who don’t earnestly contend for the Christian faith are those who are what we might call “poor athletes.” Why are they poor athletes?

¹³John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 2:919.

¹⁴Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, "An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire 'BE' Series"--Jkt. (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989), Jude 3.

1. **Ignorant.** For some it is *unintentional ignorance*. They just became a Christian and have not had anyone in their lives to disciple them or are involved in a church where biblical, theological doctrine is not taken seriously. Then there is *willful ignorance*. Willful ignorance is displayed by those who choose to be ignorant of theological truth even though they have been Christians for many years.
 - A. To illustrate the danger of ignorance I want to tell you a truthful but tragic story.

A woman was once walking along a riverbank with her child. Suddenly the child slipped into the river. The mother screamed in terror. She couldn't swim, and besides, she was in the latter stages of pregnancy. Finally, somebody heard her screaming and rushed down to the riverbank. The utter tragedy was, when they stepped into those murky waters to retrieve that now dead child, they found that the water was only waist deep! That mother could have easily saved her child but didn't because of a lack of knowledge.
2. **Indifferent.** Willful ignorance leads to theological indifference or apathy—they simply don't care. However, consider the words of Nathaniel Williams:

"Indifference to error is a sign of false liberalism and humiliating weakness."¹⁵
3. **Commit themselves to the unimportant.** They contend for those things that don't matter for eternity. In other words, they seek to pursue, practice, and pour their lives into those things that do not matter to God.
4. **Pursue the marginal, the fanciful, or the elusive** (e.g., numerology; breaking Bible codes; determining the date of the Rapture, or identifying the Anti-Christ). Rather than pursuing what is most central and vital they pursue fads and fanciful concepts that fan sensationalism. But what they do instead is misrepresent the intellectual fervor and explanatory power of the Christian faith.
5. **Unstable.** They go from one doctrinal extreme to the other, largely due to emotional circumstances in their lives. Therefore, they allow their circumstances to dictate their theological convictions rather than allowing their theological convictions to be the foundation upon which they interpret and respond to their situations. Thus, their emotional swings diminish their ability to contend for the Christian faith.
6. **Exhausted by the truth.** They are those who say they have got to get away from doctrinal truth. Contending for the Christian faith is not their joy, but merely their duty. They find pleasure in other things.

A scholar recently told me that he can't wait to take a break from his biblical and theological studies; he only wants to play video games over the Christmas break. While I understand the importance of getting away from one's work, the problem is that he separated his theological studies from pleasure. When we develop the mindset that contending for the Christian faith is only a duty and not pleasure, then there will be there will be the tendency to lose our effectiveness.

¹⁵Nathaniel M. Williams, "Commentary on the Epistle of Jude," in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, 7:8.

7. **Retired from the Christian faith.** They think that because they are retired from their vocation, they are also retired from their intimate pursuit, practice, and defense of the Christian faith. “It’s time to give the younger people an opportunity!”
8. **Lack an enduring passion for the Christian faith.** All too often they are marked by stops and starts. This is evidenced in their sporadic involvement in personal Bible study and church attendance.
9. **Become captivated by something or someone else.** For some, like a moth to a flame, they become infatuated by something or some else. To be sure, some of these infatuations may be good and noble, but they are not those activities that matter most to God.
10. **Self-promotion is their end-game.** Theological self-promoters come up with some novel idea, some doctrinal teaching with the intent to promote their name. Therefore, their doctrinal positions are used to fan their egos if not their pockets.
11. **Always question our understanding, practice, and defend Christian faith with unhealthy cynicism.** Because of unhealthy cynicism they lack the capability to offer their own robust account of the Christian faith. Or because they align theological doctrine with epistemological Cartesian certainty, they feel that if they can not have exhaustive certainty, they can have **no** accurate knowledge. For example, “*Who honestly has an objective viewpoint to really see what can be classified as theological doctrine and what is not?*” Therefore, they breed theological agnosticism.
12. **Confuse the virtue and practice of humility with theological competency.** In other words, in order to exemplify humility, doctrinal truths are reduced to tentative notions.
13. **Create the false dichotomy between “head-knowledge” vs. “heart-knowledge.”** Therefore, they call for an abandonment of the mind in order to receive illumination directly from the Holy Spirit in order become spiritually mature.
14. **Fearful because they don’t have they personal resolve to contend for the Christian faith.** They are too timid to speak. They don’t want to hurt someone’s feelings.
15. **Fearful of rejection.** They are too embarrassed to contend for the Christian faith.
16. **Relish in the pursuit of sin.** While they don’t reject God, sin displaced their desire to contend for the Christian faith; sin seared their conscience and clouded their ability to distinguish truth from error.
17. **Refuse to Contend.** Perhaps one of the more common reasons why believers fail to contend for the Christian faith is because they want to avoid doctrinal truth in order to live the way they want to live. In other words, by avoiding doctrinal truth they don’t have to face their rebellion and sin.
18. **Contending for the Christian faith is not relevant to our contemporary setting.** Some people argue that “since people long for community more than truth, the focus needs to on developing authentic relationships where they can share our personal narratives.” However, the upshot is theological ignorance is promoted and true

discipleship is reduced.

19. **Too Easily Quit!** When they face a theological obstacle they too quickly give up. There are those who resist contending for the Christian faith because they find theological studies to be “above their pay grade.” When they face the slightest challenge (e.g., a term they don’t know) they may mentally shut down, turn to silence with those blank stares, or pursue mockery. But their blank stares, their silence, and their mockery actually reveal their unwillingness to persevere in growth in order that they may earnestly contend for the truth. Remember, it is not the pastor’s sole responsibility to grow you up! You, not the pastor will be held accountable at the Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ for your faithfulness. Blaming the pastor will not be a valid excuse before the Living God (2 Cor. 5:9-10; 1 Cor. 3; 2 John 8).

One of the most common reasons I hear why we should not learn about the Christian faith is that all of this is a matter of semantics. So, they sit in the theological agnostic position. In his work, *Ryrie's Practical Guide to Communicating Bible Doctrine* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2005), Dr. Ryrie states:

"...never demean the importance of semantics. How often I have heard a student attempt to rationalize a poor or imprecise statement by saying, 'It's just a matter of semantics.' Such a response is supposed to excuse fuzzy or sloppy, if not, wrong choice of words. The student is more on target than he realizes when he says it's a matter of semantics since everything we say or write or even think concerns semantics. Semantics involves the study of meaning of words; therefore, the words we use affect the meaning we are trying to convey. So as we study, think about, teach, preach, and live the Word of God, we must pay careful attention to the words we use in communicating that they are precise, clear, and exact...sobering thought: what I teach today will be a part of shaping people, church, and missions tomorrow [pg. 9]."

20. **Too committed to everything else to have time for theological studies.** They are those who wish they had more time to contend for the Christian faith, but have found themselves spread too thin... “*like butter scraped over too much bread.*”
21. **Immobilized by doubt.** They want to believe in the Christian faith but they are fearful that these things are not really true.

On this last point some of you may be familiar with the name Charles Templeton.

There was a time when Charles Templeton was one of the most popular evangelists in the USA. He was close friend of Billy Graham—they were, at times, preaching team-mates. During the 1950s and ‘60s, Templeton preached to crowds of 10,000 to 30,000 nightly. He packed stadiums and thrilled audiences with his proclamation of “the gospel of Christ.”

But something went all wrong for him. Doubts about what he believed to be true become progressively more serious. He questioned the reliability of the Bible, the account of creation and the biblical teaching of hell. As these doubts grew, a hardening towards the things of God began to develop. He became totally hypocritical. Finally, he could bear the hypocrisy no longer. To use his own words, he bade “farewell to God.”

Two central issues why he became an agnostic were paramount: It seemed terrible for an all-loving God to proclaim that Jesus is the only way for salvation given all the people around the world who will never hear the gospel of Christ, and second, how could an all-loving, all-powerful, all-good, all-knowing God allow evil and suffering. If God is all-loving then He would want to destroy evil. If God is all-powerful, he could destroy evil. But evil remains.

In 1996, Charles Templeton published his book, the title of which expresses the sentiment just stated. “Farewell to God” – My reasons for rejecting the Christian faith.”

Lee Strobel who studied law at Yale and was the former legal editor for the Chicago Tribune was researching his latest book, *The Case For Faith* in 2000, and sought out and was granted an interview with Templeton, then 80 years old, in his penthouse apartment on the 25th floor of a high rise in Toronto, Canada.

During the course of their conversation, Templeton vigorously rejected the notion of God and the Bible. He was unchanged. Then, Strobel directed the old gentleman’s attention to Christ. Strobel says that, amazingly, Templeton’s “body language softened.” His voice took on a “melancholy and reflective tone.” And then, incredibly, he said:

“He was the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically wisest person that I’ve ever encountered in my life or in my reading. His commitment was total and led to his own death, much to the detriment of the world.”

Strobel quietly commented: “You sound like you really care about him.” “Well, yes,” Templeton acknowledged, “he’s the most important thing in my life.” He stammered: “I . . . I . . . I adore him . . . Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus.”

Strobel was stunned. He listened in shock. He says that Templeton’s voice began to crack. He then said, “I . . . miss . . . him!” With that the old man burst into tears; with shaking frame, he wept bitterly.

Finally, Templeton gained control of his emotions and wiped away the tears. “Enough of that,” he said, as he waved his hand, as if to suggest that there would be no more questions along that line. Sad, sad indeed!

Lee Strobel said that, despite denying the faith, he sorely missed having a relationship with Jesus.

In contrast, those who do contend for the truth are those:

1. Who realize that the human problem is sinfulness.
2. Expect a sinner to insist on his or her own view of things.
3. Fully aware that sin always involves an evasion of the truth.
4. Sin has ultimately contributed to intellectual confusion.
5. They do not ask whether people have assumptions and beliefs, but whether those positions are biblical and systematic.

6. Who possess an enduring passion to know, practice, and defend the truth for they draw their strength from their intimate walk with the Lord Jesus Christ by means of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they contend for the truth in the truth (Phil.4:10-13).
7. Their integrity is clear before the Lord and their humility is realized-for their goal is to glorify God and not themselves. Integrity before God undergirds theology and the theology informs integrity. Therefore, they consistently live out what they believe.
8. They recognize the sobering responsibility and privilege of being entrusted with doctrinal truth. It is a sacred responsibility that must be handed down to the next generation with the utmost care, diligence, and protection.
9. A contender of the Christian faith will take the initiative and examine every truth claim for they possess an enduring passion for welfare of the Christian faith and the lives of others.
10. Those who contend for the truth will do so with a disposition of Christian virtue knowing that any result fruit of their ministry belongs to God (Gal 5:22-23).

How to test theological claims:

I need you to listen very carefully about what I'm about to tell you. I don't want you saying, "You know, my minister is a lot like God-I don't see him all week, and I don't understand him on Sunday." ~ Haddon Robinson.

1. Examine the credibility of theological claims by asking the following questions.
 - a. Is this theological claim based upon accurate exegesis, sound logic (e.g., Law of Non-Contradiction), and truly identifying things as they actually are?

The law of contradiction means that two antithetical propositions cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. X cannot be non-X. A thing cannot be and not be simultaneously. And nothing that is true can be self-contradictory or inconsistent with any other truth. All logic depends on this simple principle. Rational thought and meaningful discourse demand it. To deny it is to deny all truth in one fell swoop.¹⁶

¹⁶ Philip Johnson writes [<http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/articles/lawofcon.htm>]:

Until a little more than a hundred years ago, the law of contradiction was almost universally accepted by philosophers as a self-evident truth. Francis Schaeffer attributed the decline of 20th-century society to the demise of the law of contradiction. He suggested that when philosophy abandons this principle it sinks beneath "the line of despair" and ultimately makes suicide the only viable course of action. Scripture very clearly affirms the law of contradiction. First John 2:21, for example, is explicit: "No lie is of the truth." Many other passages, such as 2 Timothy 2:13, ("[God] cannot deny himself") either assume or reiterate the law of contradiction.

- b. Does the theological claim possess a high degree of coherence (internal consistency)? Does the truth claim harmonize with the other doctrines, theological doctrines that we already know to be true? If it does not, then the theological claim needs to be seriously questioned.
 - c. Does the truth claim possess *explanatory power*? A truth claim will possess explanatory power if it is able to **justify** its claims with **facts** (not opinions; feelings).
 - d. Does the truth claim have more than one line of evidence? Orthodoxy is not built upon marginal issues, indirect evidence, or inferences.
 - e. Does the truth claim harmonize with church orthodoxy (e.g., orthodox creeds of the church)? In other words, what does church history have to say about it?
 - f. Is the truth claim actually livable? Too many times we get caught up in promises that prey on our wishes and perhaps our hopes. But in the end they are empty promises that one can't live out.
2. What are the dangers if we don't examine theological claims? Consider the impact both as individuals and as churches. We will have intellectual and spiritual...
- 1. **Confusion.** If confusion remains, then contamination will begin to spread like mold on a wall.
 - 2. **Contamination.** When the contamination spreads, then you will then have corruption.
 - 3. **Corruption.**

The Great Wall of China is a gigantic structure which cost an immense amount of money and labor. When it was finished, it appeared impregnable. But the enemy breached it. Not by breaking it down or going around it. They did it by bribing the gatekeepers. - Harry Emerson Fosdick.
 - 4. When the contamination spreads far enough, then you will have **fragmentation**.

This stage is very critical: Once you have fragmentation, you will then live apart from doctrinal truth. When this occurs, you then won't be able to make sense of things from God's perspective. As a result, you won't know you really are and you will be unable to grasp what is true and what is not. Moreover, you will lose your significance and purpose. The end result may be apathy...you will simply give up trying. Thus...
 - 5. Fragmentation leads to **Ambiguity**:

Listen to the words of A.W. Tozer:

We have gotten accustomed to the blurred puffs of gray fog that pass for doctrine in churches and expect nothing better. From some previously unimpeachable sources are now coming vague statements consisting of a milky admixture of Scripture, science, and human sentiment that is true to none of its ingredients because each one works to cancel the others out.

Little by little Christians these days are being brainwashed. One evidence is that increasing numbers of them are becoming ashamed to be found unequivocally on the side of truth. They say they believe, but their beliefs have been so diluted as to be impossible of clear definition. Moral power has always accompanied definite beliefs. Great saints have always been dogmatic. We need a return to a gentle dogmatism that smiles while it stands stubborn and firm on the Word of God that lives and abides forever.

6. **Deception:** Our Purpose as believers in Christ and as churches has totally turned upside down. What we originally rejected we proclaim and what we originally accepted we now scorn. We've lost our God-given identity.
7. When our duties are turned upside down, **we've lost our God-given identity.**
8. When we've lost our identity, we become **irrelevant.**

Consider the following statement by Os Guinness:

"By our uncritical pursuit of relevance we have actually courted irrelevance; by our breathless chase after relevance without a matching commitment to faithfulness, we have become not only unfaithful but irrelevant; by our determined effort to redefine ourselves in ways that are more compelling to the modern world than are faithful to Christ, we have lost not only our identity but our authority and our relevance. Our crying need is to be faithful as well as relevant." *Prophetic Untimeliness: A Challenge to the Idol of Relevance*, 15.

Like H.A. Ironside states, "God Forbid that we should traffic in un-lived truth."

IV. In Conclusion:

- A. In conclusion I want to close with a warning: As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, as members of a local church we have to ever so realize that our objectives can be easily lost. All too often objectives slowly erode; rarely do they suddenly explode. To illustrate how this can happen, listen to the following true story by Charles Paul Conn in his book, *Making it Happen*:

When I lived in Atlanta, several years ago, I noticed in the Yellow Pages, in the listing of restaurants, an entry for a place called Church of God Grill. The peculiar name aroused my curiosity and I dialed the number. A man answered with a cheery, "Hello! Church of God Grill!" I asked how his restaurant had been given such an unusual name, and he told me:

“Well, we had a little mission down here, and we started selling chicken dinners after church on Sunday to help pay the bills. Well, people, liked the chicken, and we did such a good business, that eventually we cut back on the church service. After a while we just closed down the church altogether and kept on serving the chicken dinners. We kept the name that we started with, Church of God Grill.”

- B. Let's not lose what has been handed down to us by Jesus Christ and the Apostles.