

THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH



Doctrines on Trial

William Jones

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about the author

William Jones has served as the minister of the Boulevard church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee for twenty years. Brother Jones was a frequent contributor to the **Character Under Construction** Bible study series as well as the head of his own publishing company, A Word From the Word. He has authored the previous **The Cornerstone of Our Faith** studies *The Ridiculous Runaway* and *Nehemiah*. He has been a long-time board member of Agape Child and family Services.

He received his education from Southwestern Christian College, David Lipscomb University, and Masters Seminary and School of Theology. He and his wife of twenty-nine years have three children.

introduction

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The devil is in the deception business; the devil is in the distortion business. He deceives people even today. We must be careful not to be deceived by the devil’s lies. The only way that is possible is to know and obey the truth. The biblical truth revealed in the Word of God will defeat the devil’s lies every time.

In this study we will seek to increase our discernment. We will seek to improve our knowledge of key biblical doctrines. We will put several doctrines on trial, and we will examine the evidence presented in Scripture. We will determine, based solely on the evidence of Scripture, if what is being taught and practiced is guilty of being false. The Bible itself will be judge and jury.

how to use this study

Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called **The Foundation**. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God's Word.

The second part of each lesson is called **The Cornerstone**. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section "preach." God's Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called **The Inscription**. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God's Word. To *know* the Bible is one thing; to *do* it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking **Discussion Questions** that help you explore God's Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.

Fortified Against Falsehood

The word "FOUNDATION" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font on a dark, rectangular background that has a slight gradient and a drop shadow effect.

The devil is in the deception business; the devil is in the distortion business. He deceives people even today. We must be careful not to be deceived by the devil's lies. The only way that is possible is to know and obey the truth. The biblical truth revealed in the Word of God will defeat the devil's lies every time. The issue is not how you feel about the matter, but rather what are the facts on the matter. It is not what you think, but what the truth actually is.

The historical background of the book of 1 John is the aged apostle arguing against the spurious and seriously false teaching that was being espoused by those who would come to be called "gnostics." They taught that Jesus was not God who came in the flesh. They denied and sought to dispute the truth of the incarnation.

There are still people who assert that Jesus is not God who became man. There are religious systems that deny the deity of Christ. As a result many people are being deceived. John does not want his readers confused. He writes this text to unmask false teachers and their false teaching.



The Mandate Identified

Out of deep concern for his readers, John issues a command that is as relevant today as it was when he first wrote this book. The tense of the phrase “believe not” conveys the idea of “stop believing.” It is an imperative. That means this is a command to discontinue a practice already in progress.

Apparently John’s audience was gripped by gullibility. They had a problem with discernment. John warns that you can’t believe any and every thing and any and everybody.

There are a lot of people who exhibit a naive readiness to accept any teaching no matter its source. We are warned that the lack of discernment is a sign of immaturity. “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Ephesians 4:14, 15).

What John mandates for us is that we stop trusting any and everything and start testing everything that is taught. The Greek word for “try” is *dokimazo*. It means “to put to the test.” It is a present active imperative. This connotes that we are to continually put to the test what people teach in the name of God.

It is an unfortunate but undeniable fact that there are people who accept notions of religion in ways they never would in any other discipline. Some assert that it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as your heart is right. No one would say in mathematics that it doesn’t matter how you count as long as your heart is right!

God spent about 1,500 years producing the Bible, using more than 40 different writers to instruct us about what we are to believe. If it doesn’t matter, why go to so much trouble?

If you want saving faith you can’t hear the whims of men, you must hear the word of God. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17).

What a person believes determines what he becomes. What he become determines where he belongs. You cannot believe the wrong thing and become the right thing. You can't follow the wrong directions and reach the right destination. Doctrine is determinative.

The Motive Specified

John tells us why we need to put teachers and teaching to the test. He says "many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

The truth is there are those who claim to speak for God when in fact they have not heard from God. Wherever you find faithful teachers, you will discover there will also be false teachers. The devil is involved in the corruption of truth because he is trying to cause confusion about the truth (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4).

It is because of false teaching that the Scriptures have been mishandled, the Savior has been misrepresented, and souls have been misled. The problem with false teachers is they don't always appear to be false. False prophets will even quote Scripture, but they will always misapply it. Peter calls this wresting the scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16, KJV). The word "wrest" is the Greek word *streblousin*. It means "to twist, to warp." There are people who will twist the Scriptures in order to lead you astray.

The Method Utilized

The first method to use in determining if a teacher is false is to find out what he says about Jesus. The word translated "confesses" is *homolegeo*. It means, "to say the same thing." Any teacher who does not say the same thing about Jesus that God says is a false teacher.

What does God say about Jesus? "While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly

a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:5, 6).

What is being said about Jesus?

1. Christian Scientists say Jesus was a mere man who possessed the Christ Spirit, which they say is ideal truth.
2. Jehovah Witnesses say Jesus was created as the second greatest person in the universe. They do not consider him to be God who came in the flesh.
3. Theosophists say Jesus was a man who taught good ideas.
4. Mormons say Jesus is one of many sub-gods.
5. Unitarians say Jesus is not God; they deny the trinity.
6. Muslims say Jesus is a prophet, but not the last prophet, whom they say is Mohammed.
7. Modernists say Jesus is a great ethical teacher.

John declares these and similar systems to be devil-inspired. They do not say the same thing about Jesus that God says. Jesus is not a mere man or just a good ethical teacher. He is not just a prophet. He is the God-man to whom we are told to listen.



If a teacher is wrong about what he says about Jesus, he really shouldn't be trusted to teach you anything else. False teachers are political pawns and puppets. They are stewards of the system. They accommodate their teaching to please the people who are caught up in the system.

Genuine teachers teach only what is revealed in the Bible, the Word of God. If someone makes a claim that is not backed up with the book, don't listen. Any teaching that is not backed up by the Bible must be convicted of being false doctrine. God has said what He wants to say; our job is just to reiterate it.

It is both disheartening and dangerous that there is so much biblical illiteracy, even among members of the church. It is crucial that we get in the Word so that the Word can get in us. The devil can't deceive a person who has scriptural discernment. The more you know what is right, the less likely you are to accept teaching that is wrong. If a person is bold enough to teach it we must be bold enough to test it.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some ways the devil is attempting to deceive people today?
2. What can we do to protect ourselves from the deception?
3. What dangers come with being biblically gullible?
4. Where is a great place to start to test whether a teacher is false?
5. Why is knowing biblical doctrine so important?
6. What is the cause of the biblical illiteracy that affects so many Christians?
7. What are some things you need to do to become more knowledgeable of the doctrine?
8. What can be done to increase the biblical literacy of the congregation?