

The Undermining of the Christian Faith

(Jude 3-4)

Intro

A doubting Christian wrote this email to Lee Strobel (*Investigating Faith* website), “Please help me. I have just read Bart Ehrman’s book *Misquoting Jesus*. I was raised in the church and I’m now 26 years old. This book has devastated my faith. I don’t want to be kept in the dark; I want to know what really is going on in the Bible and what I should believe, even if it goes against what I’ve believed since I was a little boy.”

In the last decade or so there have been many attacks on the Christian faith and the credibility of Jesus Christ by critical popular scholars, TV documentaries, movies, the internet, Muslim debaters and the new atheism. These forms of media are capturing the public’s imagination with radical and different views of Christianity. Many people are wondering if Christianity is true. Even some Christians are confused and starting to doubt if their faith is true and reliable.

It’s a satanic conspiracy to undermine the Christian faith. Undermine means: to wear away the base or foundation; to weaken or destroy gradually. Christ said that Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44) and his bent is to steal kill and destroy (John 10:10).

Throughout the ages there has been a continual undermining of the person and work of Christ and the reliability of the Gospels. There have been other so called gospels or gnostic gospels which certain liberal theologians and writers have used and are using to make their point that the Christian faith was borrowed or copied from the ancient mystery religions and cults. They state that Jesus Christ is a total fabrication invented by misguided people of the first and second century Christians.

Satan’s Old Tactics

Sound biblical truth is under siege. In fact, it always has been. This attack is as old as human history. It began in the Garden of Eden, when Satan twisted God’s Word and convinced Adam and Eve to disobey their Creator (Gen. 3:1-6). Ever since the father of lies (John 8:44) has tirelessly continued his bitter offensive against truth (Acts 20:29-30). His purpose is to resist the advancement of God’s kingdom at any cost. His tactics are stealthy as he baits his victims through deception and distortion.

However, despite his apparent advancements, Satan’s days are numbered. God promises that the truth will ultimately prevail and win in the end (2 Thess. 2:5-17). As for Satan and his tactics, they will be vanquished forever (Rev. 20:10).

Bible warns us

In the meantime, recognizing that Satan is still on the prowl, as Christians we must be earnest and steadfast in contending for the truth and faith. Paul exhorts us to “*guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith*” (1 Timothy 6:20-21).

We have a mandate to take the gospel seriously, doing all we can to protect and preserve its purity. Jude understood what was at stake; he knew that the church was being infiltrated by its enemies. That is why Jude wrote this letter: to alert his readers to the danger of being swept away by deception.

Jude warns us, “*But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit*” (verses 17-19).

Sloppy Scholarship

Many sound biblical scholars are critical of what they call “sloppy scholarship and unsubstantiated theories” that exist in the area of academia. They are finding that many are not going to primary sources for research and are using secondary unreliable resources. They also are not well versed in the ancient languages and culture.

Dr. Graig A. Evans is professor of New Testament at Acadia University, Nova Scotia. He has written extensively on the historical Jesus and the Jewish background of the New Testament. He has also appeared frequently on network television programs. A few years ago he wrote a book on *Fabricating Jesus*, on how modern scholars distort the Gospels. Evans says of his book that “*Fabricating Jesus* is a book that takes a hard look at some of the sloppy scholarship and misguided theories that have been advanced in recent years. I am appalled at much of this work. Some of it, frankly, is embarrassing.” (Source: *Fabricating Jesus*, 2006 IVP)

Dr. Evans says, “The problem is there are so many people pursuing doctorates, writing dissertations, pursuing tenure, and trying to get published that there is a tendency to push the facts beyond where they should go. If you’re hoping to get on the network news – well, news has got to be news. Nobody is going to get excited if you say the traditional view of the Gospel seems correct. But if you come up with something outrageous – that Jesus’ body was eaten by dogs, for example – then that warrants a headline. Or if you say there’s a gospel just as valid as Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, but it was suppressed in an early Christian power play, well, that’s news.”

“What happens is that some radical scholars are hypercritical of the canonical Gospels and shove them to the end of the first century. Then they’ll take these alternative gospels and not be critical of them at all. By being naïve and gullible, they drag them to the early second century, or they even smuggle them in supposed ‘early forms’ into the first century.”

What Biblical Scholars are saying about sloppy scholarship & unsubstantiated theories

“They don’t have the languages, they don’t study the original sources, they don’t pay attention to the dates, and they frequently quote ideas that were popular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but have already been refuted.” (Dr. Daniel B. Wallace. He is professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. He is also the founder and executive director of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts).

“Yet in many cases people are believing them – a great illustration of the old saying that falsehood can make a trip around the world before truth can even get its boots on.” (Dr. Daniel B. Wallace).

“They start with where they want to end up and then look at all the evidence selective for their purposes, rather than being open to what the evidence actually reveals.” (Dr. Martin Hengel. He was a biblical historian focusing on New Testament).

“Contemporary writers invariably use only secondary sources to verify such claims. The scholars whose judgment they accept rarely produced or quoted the primary sources.” (Dr. Thomas Boslooper. He is author and professor on Early Church History).

How Many Scientists Fabricate and Falsify Research?

A 2009 report from Edinburgh University found that a third of scientific medical researchers admitted anonymously to scientific fraud, with nearly three-fourths saying they had witnessed deliberate warping of data to achieve desired results. Daniele Fanelli, the report's author, wrote, "I had naively assumed that scientists would be principled [but scientists] are human beings driven by their interests, hopes, and beliefs. Given opportunities to cut corners by falsifying data, they may well do so." Furthermore, the science journal *Nature* estimates that around a thousand incidents of falsification or plagiarism [of scientific studies] go unreported in the U.S. every year. (Source: *Mark Meynell, A Wilderness of Mirrors: Trusting Again in a Cynical World, Zondervan 2015*. Also PLoS ONE. 2009; 4(5): e5738. Published online may 29, 2009)

The bottom question is, "How scholarly are the scholars." Are they really looking at the evidence and the primary sources?

I like what Lee Strobel said, "Follow the evidence where it leads." That means don't come with your preconceived notions and ideas and try to find only the evidence you want in order to make your point.

Lee Strobel

Lee Strobel was an award-winning journalist of the Chicago Tribune who didn't believe in God or the Bible. Having graduated from Yale Law School, he had honed his skills in reporting important legal cases and had little respect for the Scriptures.

"For much of my life," he writes, "I was a skeptic. In fact, I considered myself an atheist. To me there was far too much evidence that God was merely a product of wishful thinking, of ancient mythology, of primitive superstition." (Source: *The Case for Christ*, 1998, pg. 13).

Yet he came to admit there was a hidden reason for his skepticism about God and Christianity; "I had read just enough philosophy and history to find support for my skeptics. A fact here, a scientific theory there, a pithy quote, and a clever argument. Sure, I could see some gaps and inconsistencies, but I had a strong motivation to ignore them: a self-serving and immoral lifestyle that I would be compelled to abandoned if I were ever to change my views and become a follower of Jesus."

Accepting a challenge from his wife, however he launched into a thorough investigation concerning God, the Bible and Jesus Christ. He said, "I plunged into the case, with more vigor than with any story I have ever pursued. I applied the training I had received at Yale Law School as well as my experience as legal affairs editor of the Chicago Tribune, and over time the evidence of the world of history, of science, of philosophy of psychology began to point to the unthinkable."

The unthinkable for Strobel meant reluctantly accepting he had been wrong. He spent two years carefully gathering evidence as if he were conducting a court trial, including interviewing 13 leading scholars with impeccable credentials. The results stunned him, and he grudgingly accepted that the Bible was true and that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. As a consequence, he mentions in his book, he became a Christian.

What does this mean to us?

Doubt and confusion has been the enemy's tactic since the beginning when he tempted Adam and Eve. We live in a world where the claims of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith are going to be more and more attacked. A great deception is going to culminate on earth. Even Christians who are weak in their faith will be easily led astray.

Jesus predicted it. In Matthew 24:10-13 Jesus said, “*At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*”

Jesus also said, “*However when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*” (Luke 18:8).

In the end times there will be a great apostasy – that means people turning away from true faith.

The Church needs to address the questions and doubts

I have found that often Christians who struggle with their faith don't share that they are. They tend to keep it in – thinking that others might be judgmental of them or think that they are not spiritual enough or perhaps not real believers. We need to open up to each other and talk through our questions and doubts.

The church needs to address the questions and doubts that people go through. We need to encourage people to open up and feel safe with their questions about the Christian faith. We need to provide studies and seminars on questions about the faith.

I like the Alpha program, especially the small groups because they help people ask the questions. Many a time I have had leaders come to me with tough questions that their small group has asked. They are important questions and they need answers. That is why we are here. We need to facilitate an environment where people feel comfortable to ask questions about the faith and to express their doubts and queries.

I like what 1 Peter 3:15 says, “*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*”

Conclusion

Jesus asked his followers, “*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*” They replied, “*Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.*” “*But what about you?*” he asked. “*Who do you say I am?*” Simon Peter answered, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” Jesus replied, “*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*” (Matthew 16:13-18).

“Isaac, who do you say I am?”

This has inspired me to write my personal manifesto as to why I am a Christian. It is an apologetic statement of why I believe Christianity to be true. The more that I study and grow in my faith the more I am convinced of the reality and truth about the Christian faith and especially of Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour and Lord.

Don't get me wrong, I have had doubts too – wondering if what I was experiencing was real or not. I went through times of questioning my faith but as I looked at the evidence and followed it, it grounded me deeper in my faith.

Like doubting Thomas in the end I confess with all my heart, mind and soul that Jesus is: “*My Lord and my God*” (John 20:28).