

## Chapter 1

### Error Smuggled In

Imagine for a moment a large building with a security system. All the monitors, cameras and motion sensors are in place. The doors are locked. But surprisingly, we discover that an unauthorized entry has occurred; someone has entered the building undetected and is now in the process of stealing and vandalizing its contents. The security of the building has been compromised and now all of the occupants are at risk.

The church in the West is this building and this is by no means an overstatement. In fact, if it were possible and one could review and scrutinize the church's security tapes over the last few decades we would be shocked to see how much damage has been done and continues to be done by these, now resident, intruders. The most alarming fact is that little has been done to correct the situation. The security system has not been improved, no alarms have been sounded and no one has been held accountable for the damage. The problem continues.

We've all seen enough movies to understand that places of great importance have great security. The security should at least be adequate enough to protect the contents. Anything of value has to be protected and kept safe: this is just common sense. Valuables are always in danger of falling within the crosshairs of those who would gladly dispossess us of them.

The church in the West has been compromised in the sense that it has been infiltrated by teachers and teaching that have removed, obscured and replaced some of the most precious possessions it has - its foundational truth and teachings. However, few seem to be aware that this 'slight of hand' has occurred! In the original's place rests a counterfeit, a counterfeit that has gone undetected. This substitute is flourishing unhindered at an alarming pace and we will realize one day, at an awful price.

We have had a number of thefts in the church over its long history, only to have the truth restored centuries later. A case in point would be Martin Luther's "justification by faith" doctrine. But eventually, faith was removed and replaced with a works doctrine that slid the church into one of the darkest chapters in its history. From its very birth the church has been vigilant to defend and contend for "the faith", yet there have been perilous times where the light seemed to go out, but fortunately, was never fully extinguished.

Another article of faith restored is the foundational aspects of the priesthood of the believer. The awesome calling and setting apart of each person as a priest unto God had been stripped away and replaced by a special, privileged class of learned men called clergy. These men, by human appointment, were to represent the laity: a spiritually underprivileged class of domestic, manual workers – in other words everybody else. They were considered unqualified to approach a Holy God and enjoy a personal relationship with Him. They were denied access to the Bible's liberating truth and left to accept the dictates of craftily thought out doctrines, which in some circles continues to this day.

We could go on to enumerate the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the baptism, the infilling, the endowed power in the believer's life by the Holy Spirit, the restoring of the five-fold offices to the Church: the apostle, the prophet, the evangelist, pastor and teacher.

These gifts and enablements are given to the body by the ascended Christ and by the workings of the Holy Spirit. However different their varieties and functions, it is the same God who works all things in all people. Some of these are received with open arms while others are still rejected. Yet they are nonetheless scriptural and relevant for the Church of Jesus Christ today. Biblically sound and clearly taught in scripture, they are not intended only for a certain dispensation of time but until we all "attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4: 13; 1 Corinthians 12: 1- 14). All of which I believe we have not attained.

Men of every age, pawns themselves in a war for their hearts, minds and ultimately their eternal souls have wreaked havoc on the Church, attempting to squash it either with physical powers, made up of armies and emperors, or with insidious and crafty doctrines that have crept in undetected. These, in time, resulted in splits and factions further distorting the truth and maligning the names and characters of those who have labored so hard in establishing the foundations and structure of the Church. Even to the point of denying Jesus Himself who saved them. (Read 2 Peter 2: 1-3)

We read in Jude 1:3, "Beloved while I was making every effort to write to 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" (NASB).

One may not immediately discern the urgency of this verse or grasp the scope of the spiritual war which had already engulfed the Church. Certain people had stealthily brought error into the early Church. One gets the sense that Jude is sounding an alarm as he details the present condition of the church. He is appealing to all those "called beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ" (1:1) .

What is the appeal? To contend earnestly for the faith or put another way 'to struggle and fight for the faith that was delivered or yielded to the saints'. This appeal was not some unfounded "Cry wolf": the wolves were already in the barn!

Starting at verse 4 we read, "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our Lord into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ." This verse illuminates their threatening motive. The reason why these men "crept" in, or in the Greek rendering, 'moved in stealthily, alongside' the believers in the Church, was to pervert the true grace of God into a license to live in a continued state of lawlessness, immorality and wantonness while enjoying the benefits of the Christian community.

They could have remained in the world and lived their lives of wantonness and lust without reproof. So why become part of the Body and risk condemnation and rejection from that Body for an apparent void or lack of repentance and godly fruit? Unless of course it was a deceptive strategy

with the hope to spread heresy that everyone, or many would eventually buy into. You could say this was the original prototype of “cheap grace.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, “The Cost of Discipleship,” describes “cheap grace” as “the preaching of forgiveness without repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”(page 47)

This is a grace which places no requirements on the believer. Yes, grace needs to be preached in such liberal and generous terms that we may need to ask ourselves “does this grace even allow me to sin?” The answer is, no, of course not, but it makes allowance for sin. As deep, as large and as often as we fail, grace is not rendered deficient by our great need of it. “...but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...” (Romans 5:20). There is a liberty and freedom in a true grace teaching that baffles the legalist. We are able to live and breathe without a hundred and one parameters chaining us to some invisible stake in the ground called conformity to the group, sect or denomination.

The proponents of this perverse grace were seeking a license to continue in their old sinful habits. They desired forgiveness for their sin but were unwilling to repent of their ways and attitudes thus stopping short of forgiveness of the sinner because they did not truly desire it. They wanted to continue in their sinful ways and spread this counterfeit grace message as genuine - no repentance, no confession, no cross.

Denying our Lord and Master is a heavy charge against anyone and Jude lays down the line. That someone would knowingly deny the Lord, having been genuinely born again, having seen and tasted the goodness of God, and then turn around and deny Him and even work against Him is disturbing. However disturbing, it is indeed possible. The type of denial that Jude is referring to in this verse is a simple one: it is a denial that contradicts the very essence and purpose of God’s grace through the saving work of Jesus Christ. To deny His work is in my opinion to deny the Lord Himself.

The Pharisees of Jesus day were a prime example of this. Unwilling to acknowledge the many miracles He performed as being from God, they blatantly accused Him of doing so by the power of the devil.

Notice that the scripture in verse 4 says “ungodly persons.” Now were they heathen, ungodly persons that crept in unaware? This is possible but highly unlikely. Strange people coming into your fellowship would raise a few eyebrows, especially if they started promoting doctrines that were odd and unfamiliar. But if a person had been around for a period of time, say a member of the church, and they had earned a measure of respect and spiritual stature then the possibility of them advancing their revelation or new teaching is much greater. In this way, the ‘new doctrine’ has a much greater chance of being rooted and established than any effort from some ungodly stranger in our midst.

However, if these same people hold a position of authority and teach their congregations, there is little to inhibit the error from taking root in their assemblies. 2 Peter 2:1 teaches “But false

prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves” (NASB).

We certainly take note of the fact that these were false prophets. But more startling is the phrase “arose among the people.” They were not strangers creeping in rather these “false prophets” came from among them and were undetected because they had already gained trust and confidence among the body of believers. At some point, these teachings were spawned in hope to germinate in the hearts and minds of believers. Why would a believer do that, or better yet, could a believer intentionally bring forth what the Bible labels “destructive or damnable heresies”?

The short answer at this point would be yes, for the same reason that Judas betrayed Jesus or Demas abandoned Paul. One’s personal motivation may never come to the light of day and people are still free to make their own choices, right or wrong.

Remember the analogy at the beginning of this chapter about the building and its security system. The building was compromised and yet no intruder was detected. The only obvious conclusion would be to assume, with some accuracy, that there was someone in the building who was “cleared” to be in the building that really should not have been allowed to be in the building.

2 Peter 2:1 reveals the strategy of these characters. These false teachers will “secretly introduce destructive heresies” as the King James reads: “there shall be false teachers among you who privily (privately) shall bring in damnable heresies.”

The Greek here is of great value in understanding this verse: “privily shall bring in.” The Greek word here is *paraeisago* which is a compound word made up of three words:

- **para:** ‘alongside and very close’ from which we get our word parasite. It doesn’t get much closer than that!
- **eis:** means ‘into’ and conveys the idea of penetration.
- **ago:** simply put means ‘I lead’.

Let us take these three words and put them together in the context of what Peter is teaching here. Basically, he is saying: These false teachers are leading the way into our minds and bringing in destructive heresies alongside of the truth to avoid detection and to penetrate the minds of the hearers. False teaching has to be intertwined with truth to get in ‘undetected’ and it will be taught to the Church by those already in the Church. You might say it is being smuggled in.

The responsibility of the Church is to continue to be vigilant, not necessarily posting sentries at the front door for Sunday service or the weekly Bible study, but monitoring the teaching we hear day to day or week to week. Some disputes may not be worth the energy to contend for because many just fizzle out on their own, but there are some teachings that necessitate we be as astute as the Berean Christians.

The Bereans were more noble minded than the Christians of Thessalonica “for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17: 10, 11 NASB).

The ‘absence’ of certain foundational truth taught and passed down to us for the life and well being of the Body provides fertile ground for other strange teaching to take hold and flourish. Foundational truth has to be guarded from all counterfeits.

Every believer has to take some serious spiritual inventory on a regular base. We need to ask ourselves periodically; does what I believe produce godly fruit in my life? Are these teachings in line with Biblical truth and not just our own particular Church doctrines? To love the truth we may have to go outside the camp of familiarity and our own denominational indoctrination we automatically accept at times without question.

Paul, the apostle, dealt with a number of false teachings and counterfeit doctrines. There were the Gnostics - the ‘I know people’ - with all their ‘super spiritual’ revelations and visions that were above scriptural scrutiny. Then there were Judaizers who constantly were looking for inroads with their brand of legalism and control trying to reintroduce the new believers into an old bondage. Then there was also Hymenaeus and Philetus who went around teaching that the resurrection of the dead had already taken place, with a host of others trying to merchandize their doctrinal wares and erroneous teachings.

Note in 2 Timothy 2:18: “men who have gone astray from the truth” or men who once knew and chose a contrary doctrine for whatever reason and were now teaching error yet still believing it to be the truth.

All of us at some point whether we want to admit it or not have embraced and may have even taught error or what may have become a heresy. The point being, anyone can at some point be deceived with some form of teaching, and even be a conduit of some scriptural inaccuracy. However, when the truth came “knocking on our door”, how did we receive the correction?

The simple fact remains: many times we believe what we choose to believe and are convinced that it is the truth even if it is not. Therefore it is crucial that we walk in humility and remain teachable especially if we achieve fame or great success in life. In fact, as we have seen in times past the bigger the name the more isolated and insulated famous or successful personalities become towards any course adjustments or correction. Their mindset being, ‘whom do I submit to, I am renowned in the land’? Everyone is envious of my ministry,’ and so any form of counsel may be viewed as criticism and is dismissed or marginalized.

I will return to the building (church) analogy. If we are all occupants of the same building, actually let’s take it further, if we are all family (God’s family?) should not our main interest be solely for the safety and security of our fellow occupants, providing the utmost security for what has been entrusted to us by the owner God? Unfortunately the history of the church says otherwise. Church history is replete with episodes of one faction erecting walls within ‘the building’ to isolate themselves from other groups, or to isolate other ‘occupants’. Time after time, communication lines were strained and then cut off. Any warnings or alarms did little to correct overall problems

in the building and each group was content to monitor, to varying degrees, their own doorways. While some were more vigilant to contend for the overall security of the building, others seemed only focused on their own interest.

Church history bears witness that certain interpretations of scripture divided the church which led to denominational walls that further isolated the Body of Christ. Each denomination embraced their particular brand or view all the while raising the bar of performance requiring their disciples to follow more exclusive stringent demands. Other groups decried the errors infiltrating the early church and genuinely tried to stop the influx that threatened to undermine the understood true scriptural teaching of the day.

I realize this is a simplistic overall view of what we have evolved into as the church in the West. Yet I think it gets the point across that we are no longer unified on a large scale as one body of believers entrusted with treasure given to us by the Lord Himself. Many who seek their own interest would like nothing more than to steal, kill and destroy the teachings (treasures) and even the Lord Himself if they could. Those inside the 'building' who are, for whatever personal reasons of gain, choosing to advance their own agendas and forgetting what has been entrusted to them by the Lord will one day stand before the Lord. There we will all give an account of what we have said and done in respect to "dividing accurately the word of truth" in the name of God.

Can we afford to disregard the past and continue to stand by and watch as other great tenets of the faith are either hi-jacked or disregarded altogether as the church moves towards another Dark Age: one that is rooted and misguided with the exaltation of self interest, self serving, self love; a Gospel that caters to every whim of our carnal man; a message that is cloaked to appeal to our carnal man yet lacks the transforming power of the Cross to transform the man?

I would like to interject a comment here that I will cover more extensively in a later chapter. There is an increasing surge of desire in the Church for power and miracles. This is certainly scriptural in the sense of wanting to see God's Spirit moving through the church as the gospel is preached with signs following, but alarming on the other hand if it is generated by human zeal and energy. It is frightening if it is a spiritual form of manipulation being exercised over groups of desperate believers wanting nothing more than to be used by God to perform signs and wonders. The point being: power in the hands of anyone with ulterior motives is dangerous. The natural man within must be dealt with by the cross, a person cannot allow ambition and desire to marginalize the Holy Spirit, and yet that is exactly what is happening as the church puts forward its seeker friendly appeals with a generic Gospel that cannot convict anyone of sin.

Any teaching that leaves the flesh intact and uncrucified where man can remain unbroken, strong in himself and where his natural skills and abilities point back towards himself only to edify himself, is evidence enough that the Cross has not been applied or allowed to carry on its deadly but life transforming process.

The Bible teaches "the mind set on the flesh is hostile towards God, for it does not subject itself to the law of God for it is not even able to do so" (Rom. 8:7 NASB). Left to our own natural thinking, our carnal minds can only produce thoughts that are sinful, self-serving and hostile towards God. In fact, our carnal minds CANNOT subject or submit themselves to God; only as

we choose to be led by the Spirit of God can we actually begin to think spiritual thoughts that please the Lord.

PREVIEW