

Introduction

In 1517, Martin Luther, the Father of the Protestant Reformation, posted his famous 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Four years later, in 1521, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V summoned him to the Diet (formal meeting) of Worms to recant and to renounce those Theses. But Luther refused. He declared instead: **"Unless I am convinced by proofs of Scripture or by plain and clear reasons and arguments, I cannot and will not retract, for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything against conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me, Amen."**

Notice those stirring words: **"Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise."** The evidence indicates that Luther didn't speak them. Someone who later printed what he spoke probably added them instead. Nonetheless, they do accurately represent his posture toward Scripture. He stood unwaveringly on it and could not do otherwise.

You and I, as disciples of Jesus and Americans, desperately need to do the same. Our text, Jude 1-4, teaches us just that.

The Passage

Verses 1 and 2 contain the typical greeting that characterized first century letters. It identifies the letter's author, Jude, who was the brother of Jesus and His **"bond-servant."** It also names its recipients, **"those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ."** They were Christians in other words.

Verse 3 reveals what prompted Jude to write the letter. He intended to write them a pastoral letter about their **"common salvation,"** one that recalled and rejoiced in their spiritual experiences together. But then he heard about a problem they had, which compelled him to write a sort of broadside instead, meaning a letter to set them straight.

Verse 4 states what that problem was. False teachers had come into their church and were leading some of them astray. Several heresies

(false worldviews) assailed 1st and 2nd century Christianity. This one, which was pre-Gnostic, taught "**licentiousness**," to quote verse 4. Since God's grace is wide enough to cover any sin, it asserted, one can sin freely. It also denied "**our only Master and Lord, Jesus.**" He was a mere man, it contended, certainly not divine.

That was the heresy in the midst of Jude's readers and he told them what to do about it in verse 3. This is one of my favorite lines in the Bible, "**contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.**" The term "**the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints**" referred to a specific body of belief and practice, which was the preaching, teaching, and writings of the apostles. The first century church widely accepted that faith, that body of belief and practice, for what it was, God's authoritative word, what I'm calling today "**the gospel of God.**" Because it was that, Jude declared, his readers should contend earnestly for it.

Two Dominant Worldviews

And so should we. We should because we need to. The 1st and 2nd century heresies have their counterparts today. They are the host of false worldviews or belief systems that permeate our world. Let me identify and briefly explain the two most dominant of those.

One is Naturalism. The central tenet of Naturalism is that the material world is all that exists. There are no spiritual (non-material) realities. That particular tenet leads logically to others including moral relativism, multiculturalism, pragmatism, and utopianism to name a few.

Naturalism now dominates Europe, and in many ways the United States as well. It has penetrated profoundly and practically into the thinking and living of the masses here. Take its moral relativism for instance. In a Gallup poll, 69% of the Americans surveyed said there are no moral absolutes. In a Barna poll, 71% of the Americans surveyed said there is no such thing as absolute truth. That point of view explains the widespread acceptance of living together, homosexuality, materialism,

and more as valid lifestyles.

There's a second false dominant worldview. It's Islam. Islam has six basic doctrines or "**Articles of Faith**" to be believed: (1) There is one God, Allah; (2) Angels exist and serve God; (3) God revealed His will in the Koran; (4) God called prophets, the last of whom was Mohammed; (5) God will resurrect and judge all of mankind; and (6) God's will is supreme and always done. Islam also has five pillars or duties to be performed: (1) Routinely declare that there is no God except Allah and that Mohammed is His messenger; (2) Pray ritually five times a day; (3) Give alms (2.5%) to the needy and poor; (4) Fast during Ramadan; and (5) Make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime.

Islam is the second largest religion in the world, after Christianity, with an estimated 1.6 billion adherents. But it's also the fastest growing religion. If current trends continue, it will surpass Christianity as the largest by 2050. There are approximately 2.9 million Muslims in the United States today, an increase of 67% since 9-11.

Those then are two most dominant of the false worldviews today, Naturalism and Islam.

The Assailing of Christianity

And they're assailing Christianity. We mustn't be naïve about this. They threaten not just its vitality but its very existence as well.

Naturalism does. Naturalism is atheistic. But it morphed during the last part of the 20th century and became "**anti-theistic**" as well. That means it's hostile to worldviews that believe in God, especially Christianity, and seeks to eradicate them. Its attacks on Christianity are increasing in their frequency and vigor. Examples abound.

In 2006, for instance, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins published a book titled *The God Delusion*, which had an unusually long run on the *New York Times* bestseller list. He maintains in it that religious instruction is a form of child abuse. He also suggests that the government should put a stop to it, which is chilling.

Please grasp that Dawkins isn't a fringe phenomenon. Attacks on Christianity are now mainstreamed. Critics, for instance, regularly liken politically active Christians to the Taliban. Newscasters like Chris Matthews and Bryan Williams may not say that but we can infer that they think it from what they do say. Then there's the name-calling we hear. Respected leaders and writers have called Christians everything from "lug nuts" and "clowns" to "poor, uneducated, and weak." Be sure of it. Naturalism is assailing Christianity.

Islam is too. It threatens Christianity by denying the fundamentals of our faith. It claims, for instance, that God isn't triune, that Mohammed is superior to Jesus who was just a man, that Jesus didn't die on the cross, that the New Testament isn't the inspired word of God, that people earn salvation by following the five pillars, and more. That's what it claims and some are convinced. According to an NBC News report, **"20,000 Americans convert to Islam each year, 75% of them women."** Ironically enough, one CAIR report claims that 34,000 Americans converted to Islam in the months after the 9-11 attacks.

The biggest threat, however, is from radical Islam. I mentioned the five pillars or duties. For a minority of Muslims, there's a sixth called Jihad, or holy war. Those who subscribe to Jihad comprise a radicalized movement called **"Islamofascism."** They have a maniacal hatred of the United States and Christianity and are devoted to their destruction by any means possible – hence 9-11 and who knows what else ahead.

Anyway, my point is this. Pre-Gnosticism and Gnosticism assailed 1st and 2nd century Christianity. In a different way but just as seriously, Naturalism and Islam are assailing 21st century Christianity.

Contending for the Faith Handed Down

And Jude teaches us how we should respond. It's as first century Christians did, **"contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints."** Or going back to Martin Luther, **"stand on"** the Gospel of God, the Bible. That's our best and

most effective response to Naturalism and Islam. Stand unwaveringly on the Gospel of God. We stand unwaveringly on it by doing four things.

First, believe the Gospel of God.

The American church on the whole has a problem in that regard and it's this. Its faith isn't the one which was once for all handed down to the saints. It isn't the faith of Paul, Martin Luther, George Fox, John Wesley, and Oswald Chambers. It's a new faith instead, one that's tailored to fit the consumer and therapy mentality of our culture. I saw a church ad that said: **"You don't have to fit the gospel. We make the gospel fit you."** That's precisely it. Many Christians and churches aren't self-aware or honest enough to admit it, but that's what they do.

Let's not be among them. Desire and demand the true Gospel of God instead. Examine the Bible thoughtfully, objectively, and thoroughly. Understand what its writers intended to say. Then believe that, not some watered down Americanized version of it. That's where standing on the Gospel of God begins.

Standing on the Gospel of God requires a second thing. Live it out and I mean in the most important matters of our lives. I heard a pastor say, **"I'd have a rebellion on my hands if I preached what the Bible really says about money, sports, dress, mutilation of the body, and burn out."** He was implying two things. Many in his church weren't living out what the Bible says about those matters, and they didn't want to hear they weren't. What about us? Do we live out what the Bible says about the most important matters, even when we don't like it? Standing on the Gospel of God requires that of us.

It requires a third thing. Promote it. Many of us struggle with that don't we? Our problem is the cultural pressures we feel. Let's face it. The Gospel of God can be quite upsetting to people, especially in this pluralistic society of ours. It might offend them and make them think we're radicals, bigots, or even incompetents. So, we keep it to ourselves, praying that our lives will be witness enough.

But they never are. People are never won by the witness of our

lives alone. They need the content of the Gospel of God and so we give it to them. We use it to address what matters the most to them. I met a non-Christian chemistry major, for instance. So, I told him about Jesus as the Master of Molecules, changing the molecular structure of water into the molecular structure of wine.

There's a fourth thing that standing on the Gospel of God requires of us. Defend it. Hostile non-Christians and ignorant Christians routinely attack it. In either case, we need to counter the attack. God and His Gospel are true, absolutely, and thus worthy of being defended.

An attorney once told two others and me that the Bible is hopelessly out of date. I couldn't let that go. So I challenged him on it. I asked him if he concluded that after actually studying the Bible. He admitted that he didn't. I then told him that the Bible addresses the most important matters in human life like money, anger, sex, criticism, work, manipulation, the tongue, and so on. I also told him it gives us the best information we can get about those matters and gave examples.

He disliked me saying that but it was a constructive thing to do. It gave the other two attorneys and him an understanding of the Gospel of God they didn't have before. They may not believe it but at least they understand it. And remember, understanding is the basis of belief.

So that's our best and most effective response to Naturalism and Islam. Believe, live out, promote, and defend the Gospel of God.

Conclusion

I have three books here. The first is *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins, which represents Naturalism. The second is the Koran, which represents Islam. And the third is the Bible, which represents the Gospel of God. Let me ask you a question in closing. Where do you stand? Is it on Naturalism, Islam, watered-down Christianity, or the Gospel of God? I know where I stand. It's on the Gospel of God. I cannot do otherwise.