

EXPOSING THE SABOTAGE OF CHRISTIANITY FROM WITHIN

THE COMING APOSTASY



MARK HITCHCOCK
JEFF KINLEY

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The Coming Apostasy: Exposing the Sabotage of Christianity from Within

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INTRODUCTION

IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE, disgruntled workers developed a subversive tactic that involved throwing a shoe into factory machinery, causing it to grind to a halt, ruining all productivity. This act of aggression became known as *sabotage* (from *sabot*, the French word for shoe).¹ A single shoe thrown into the gears could wreak untold havoc on a well-oiled machine.

Today, we are witnessing the relentless sabotage of Christianity and the church from within. Subtle saboteurs are tossing one theological shoe after another into the machine, causing spiritual bewilderment and breakdowns.

Satan has always worked to sabotage the work of God through human false teachers. And although Satan has many shoes and strategies, his two main areas of sabotage are against the *written* Word of God (the Scriptures) and the *living* Word of God (the Savior, Jesus).² The devil's first recorded words in the Bible are spoken to Eve in the Garden of Eden, and they drip with doubt and denial: "Indeed, has

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God said . . . ?”³ Since that time, the hiss of the serpent has echoed down through the ages, from generation to generation, as he questions, undermines, and sabotages the Bible. As David Jeremiah says,

[Satan] isn't just given to one approach. If he can't take the Word of God away from us by undermining its authority, he will take us away from the Word of God by giving us another basis of authority. Satan has developed just such a substitute, and it seems to have a great attraction for many people.

It's called *experience*.

People become so wrapped up in their spiritual experience that they no longer look to the Word of God for their authority. Their experience becomes the determining force in their lives.⁴

Dr. Jeremiah closes with this powerful observation:

Two groups, then, are vying for our minds—but with the same end in view. [Liberal scholars] would take the Bible away from us, and those who hold to the experiential view would take us away from the Bible.⁵

We could not agree more. Sound doctrine is under siege. The Bible is being either reduced, outright rejected, or replaced by how people feel about whatever moral or theological topic is under consideration.

INTRODUCTION

However, nothing we see should surprise us. The Bible predicted that this day would come. Scripture tells us that the tide of apostasy will crest as the end draws near. This portent of the end is referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 as the falling away or the final great apostasy. That season may be arriving very soon. In light of this sobering reality, our main goal in this book is to unmask the current sabotage aimed at the authority and sufficiency of the Bible and targeting the exclusivity of Jesus as the only way to God. We also want to arm you with the truth, heighten your discernment, and recalibrate your thinking and living in accordance with the plumb line of God's truth. These are serious issues for the church and for every believer. A great deal is at stake.

May the Lord be pleased to use this book in the life of every reader as He has graciously used it already in the lives of its authors.

CHAPTER 1

GOD AND GHOST SHIPS

Some have . . . suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

I TIMOTHY 1:19

CAPTAIN DAVID MOREHOUSE was accustomed to the choppy waters of the North Atlantic, but he wasn't prepared for what caught his eye this winter's day. Sailing some four hundred miles east of the Azores Islands, Morehouse encountered a disturbing sight. It was a ship, which in itself is not unusual to spot on the open sea. What was odd was that this particular two-masted brig seemed to be in great distress. Its canvas sails tattered by a relentless wind, the ship drifted aimlessly in open water. From his vantage point aboard the *Dei Gratia*, Captain Morehouse was unable to see anyone on deck of the wayward vessel. And so, after calling out and receiving no reply, the British captain gave orders to come alongside the

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mystery ship. He sent a boarding party to inspect the ship, but his first mate and two crew members failed to find a single soul aboard.

Instead, what they discovered was a full cargo containing 1,701 barrels of crude alcohol, along with a six-month supply of food and water. What was missing was the ship's only lifeboat. Gone, too, were its captain, Benjamin S. Briggs, his wife, Sarah, and their two-year-old daughter, Sophia, along with eight crew members. However, they found closets of clothes left behind, suggesting a sudden departure. During the one-hour inspection, the *Dei Gratia's* boarding crew also observed a disassembled pump and three and a half feet of water sloshing around in the hull. But aside from these curiosities, the 108-foot-long vessel appeared to be seaworthy.

The creaking ship discovered by Captain Morehouse on December 5, 1872, turned out to be the *Mary Celeste*. Records later showed the ship had set sail on November 7 from New York headed for Genoa, Italy. But something happened along the way, and the *Mary Celeste* was now long overdue. And those now aboard the *Dei Gratia*, whose Latin name means "by the Grace of God," could only hope and pray that same grace would watch over the lost ship's passengers and crew.

The tragic tale of the *Mary Celeste* has become one of the most puzzling mysteries in maritime history. Many theories have been offered to make sense of this perplexing story and what happened—everything from pirates to storms and high seas, even sea monsters. Experts still scratch their heads as to

why Captain Briggs would give orders to abandon a ship that showed no signs of imminent danger.

But nearly 150 years past that cold December day, and after speculation in articles, books, poems, and even movies, we are today no closer to knowing what led to the *Mary Celeste*'s fate than Morehouse was. In the absence of captain or crew, the ship had drifted off course in the open sea for some two weeks before being discovered. Instead of reaching its intended destination, the *Mary Celeste* has gained the enduring infamy of being history's quintessential ghost ship.

OUR CURRENT CONDITION

Unless you've spent the past few years cast away on a deserted island, you've no doubt come to the conclusion that ours is a planet in peril. We are a culture in chaos, a human race caught in the epicenter of a global storm. Like the *Mary Celeste*, we are adrift as a planet, lost in a turbulent sea of confusion and uncertainty. And it's no longer just the experts who recognize the imminent crises threatening our world. According to a nationwide poll, 41 percent of adults believe we are living in the "end times."¹ An acute awareness of our world's troubles has finally filtered down to the average person. And the reigning consensus is that planet earth is showing all the signs of rapidly approaching disaster on multiple levels.

In other words, we're in deep, choppy waters here.

This moment in time is a markedly different one than our

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parents' or grandparents' generation knew. Though previous generations may have witnessed world war, economic recession, and political upheavals, this present dark hour carries a distinctly apocalyptic cargo. Upon first glance, the happenings in recent history may more closely resemble a bad dream or a sci-fi movie scenario. Despite some who naively imagine things getting better, an honest, open-eyed appraisal of humanity's situation reveals much more dystopia than utopia. This is reality, not some hopeful, future fantasy. Further, it's *your* reality. The world in which you live is becoming increasingly volatile, rising and falling like a ship's bow in a furious tempest, wildly tossed about. Instability, unrest, and uncertainty are constants in this contemporary global drama. The world is changing—and not for the better.

Of course, it's human to question and to wonder whether history's hurricane is about to make landfall. Having saturated ourselves in sin, we have to wonder, *Is Revelation finally setting sail toward our shores?*

Scan culture's horizon, and what do we see? Rage-filled citizens rioting in the streets, looting local businesses due to perceived injustice in their community. Immigrants and refugees embroiled in an unprecedented international crisis, the consequences of which are as yet unknown. Mass shootings, combined with an ongoing epidemic of violence and homicide, have almost anesthetized us to murder.² And the body count among the unborn continues to rise, nearing 1.5 billion butchered worldwide in the name of “reproductive rights.”³

The ancient Canaanites got nothing on us.

But that's not all. Keep looking around, and you'll see state and federal authorities, along with Supreme Court justices, passing laws and declaring edicts sanctioning, legalizing, endorsing, promoting, and even wholeheartedly celebrating homosexual activity and same-sex marriage. Men who self-identify as women are allowed to use women's restrooms, exposing young girls to potential trauma, abuse, and attack. Our society's moral conscience has dulled to the point where we now proudly call evil "good" and good "evil." This sad commentary on our nation tragically parallels an earlier time in Israel's history when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes."⁴ Today, there's even a proposal within some psychiatric circles to destigmatize sexual offenses such as pedophilia, instead referring to people who commit these offenses as "minor-attracted persons."⁵ In our contemporary moral climate, just about anything goes—except, of course, biblical morality. Our culture's collective decadence is eclipsed only by the individual depravity of those who define it. It's a critical breach in humanity's hull, letting in a flood of lunacy disguised as "enlightenment" and "progressive thought." And the water keeps pouring in.

Political correctness has become one of our new idols, and one that demands we pay regular veneration and worship. It dare not be ignored or angered lest we feel its wrath. To merely disagree, for example, with trendy, "richer" views of morality is to be charged with hate speech or bigotry. Historical Judeo-Christian values are systematically being sandblasted from the walls of conscience with pagan, Mardi Gras morals chiseled

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in their place. To suggest there is still an absolute, objective morality regarding issues such as sexuality or marriage is to be instantly judged, cast into the public court of shame and ridicule, and summarily stoned to death by popular opinion and social media. As a result of this and other glaring evidences of moral decay, many believe we are witnessing in real time the systematic collapse of Western civilization. It's almost as if it were all part of a larger, sinister plan and strategy.

Yes, something is very wrong with *humanity*, something as a race we collectively refuse to acknowledge. In truth, the root causes of our evil obsessions go much deeper than social, psychological, or even moral causes. What lies under the surface of our universal insanity is a spiritual problem, a deadly virus, birthed in our first parents and passed down from generation to generation.

But keep looking, now internationally, and we see that global economic stability has never been so volatile, with multiple nations teetering toward default and financial collapse. According to the World Economic Forum, earth's economy is currently vulnerable on a number of fronts and more than ever at risk to suffer "global shocks." These economic tremors do not respect national borders and can potentially shake whole financial systems and societies to their foundations.⁶ Like at no other time in recorded history, the international community has become linked together. What happens financially in one nation often dramatically impacts another, with one country's economic crisis sending concentric ripple effects to ten others, or more. This has led

to an unprecedented interdependence in an ever-emerging one-world financial market.

In its Global Risks 2014 Report, the World Economic Forum states, “A fiscal crisis in any major economy could easily have cascading global impacts.”⁷ Put simply, this world-wide economic house of cards could collapse at any time, an unfolding scenario which seamlessly syncs with Revelation’s portrayal of future economic disaster.⁸

Look around, and you’ll see that our world is also facing a number of humanitarian crises, one of which is the more than 780 million hungry people in the world today.⁹ Though the vast majority of these are from developing countries, they nevertheless represent one out of every eight people on the planet. Imagine the scale of impact when global famine eventually hits the world, as forecast in Revelation. Chances of thriving, both in third-world and developed countries, will rapidly go from unlikely to virtually impossible. Additionally, human trafficking, sex trafficking, and sex slavery together globally form a \$32 billion industry involving some 21 million victims worldwide.¹⁰

What on earth have we become?

From a geopolitical perspective, the Middle East remains a delicate minefield, easily set off by a single misstep. Add to this ticking time bomb Iran’s stealthy efforts to develop nuclear weapons capabilities. Iran’s stated desire is to remove the Jewish nation as the cancerous “tumor” in the body of the Islamic world, wiping Israel from the face of the earth.¹¹ Meanwhile, Israel has its own problems as ongoing conflict

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with Syrian-based Hamas threatens to erupt like a powder keg at any given moment. Recurring missile strikes from both sides are now a regular part of life in the Middle East.

According to Bible prophecy, Russia is poised to be an end-times player and continues to reinforce its reputation as a world bully, having previously established its presence on Israel's border. Drunk on its own power, Russia's next move remains unknown, but this nation could very well be positioning itself for the apocalyptic war Ezekiel predicted.¹²

But there's more.

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is the latest unwelcome arrival on the world terrorist scene. Even so, it has managed to have a massive, devastating impact in a relatively short span of time. Begun as a splinter group from al-Qaeda, this barbaric death cult has become well known for military campaigns, invasions, brutal torture, and public executions, including crucifixion. It is apocalyptic Islam on steroids, a brand of jihadist ideology that believes the coming of their Mahdi (messiah) can be hastened as the world is engulfed in chaos and carnage.¹³ Ironically, their favorite method of execution is beheading. Reviving an ancient form of bloody barbarism, ISIS has branded itself as a group of modern-day human butchers. Beheadings have now happened right here in the United States, even in rural communities.¹⁴ And these wicked warriors do not discriminate, as they brutally slaughter hundreds of women and small children. The masked monsters of ISIS also produce their own "snuff videos," featuring selected beheadings and executions,

posting them online in an attempt to bolster their cause and terrorize peace-loving people worldwide.

This growing terrorist body is well financed and organized. Its short-term goal is to create a “caliphate” (Islamic State) in Syria and Iraq. Forcing over a million Iraqis from their homes, many of them Christians, ISIS has also taken control of oil fields and seized cities in that region. But their gruesome aspirations are not confined to the Middle East. A US Army Intelligence bulletin has warned of potential attacks in America by ISIS supporters and sympathizers targeting US military personnel and their families, threatening to “show up [at their homes] and slaughter them.”¹⁵

Of course, the terrorist roots of this radicalism can be traced back to a several-thousand-year-old hatred of Jews. Now, like a deadly virus, this evil enmity has mutated, branching out with the goal of destroying other equally despised infidels (Christians, friends of Israel, or anyone unwilling to submit to the oppressive religious demands of these sadistic serial murderers).

As if this weren’t enough, on American soil, lone-wolf terrorist attacks (sometimes erroneously labeled “workplace violence”) have burst the bubble of our assumed protective insulation from this threat. A new tentacle of terrorism has developed as individuals now self-radicalize with bloody vendettas targeting non-Muslims. Unfortunately, there is no guaranteed and effective preventative measure against such rampages.

Negotiation has proved impossible with an ideology whose adherents believe they’ve been given a “holy mandate”

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to subjugate or kill outsiders. They do not debate, argue, barter, or waver in fulfilling their mission but are wholly committed to their unholy cause. And there is every indication this brand of terrorism will continue gaining momentum as sleeper cells infiltrate free societies in order to conquer and destroy them. Who would have ever dreamed words like *jihad* and *terrorism* would earn permanent places in our national vocabulary? The imminent threat of another terrorist attack, whether on a local or large scale, is not a matter of *if* but rather *when*, as our military and intelligence leaders believe these jihadists are already on American soil.¹⁶ We do know there are currently some thirty-five Islamic terrorist training camps scattered all across America.¹⁷ These Muslim extremists have also pledged to one day “raise the flag of Allah in the White House.”¹⁸

We have officially passed through the looking glass and into another reality altogether. And there is every indication our world is drifting toward destruction.

But this is what happens when mutiny ensues and humanity defiantly casts God overboard. These are the consequences to resisting and rejecting Him, ripple effects from refusing to acknowledge the Creator’s existence and regal right to rule His own creation. God turns us over to ourselves. Billions of people, bound by an enslaving depravity.

However, if our eyes are fixed only on humanity and world events, we could easily be overcome with fear and uncertainty, and often this fear leads to unhealthy isolation and reclusiveness as we withdraw from engaging culture and

being Christ's witnesses in the world. Weathering this current sin-storm, Christ's disciples can also default to self-reliance instead of dependence on our Lord, as what's wrong with our world can have a debilitating effect on our faith in God. Looking at the chaos surrounding us, we may even wonder if He is still at the helm. Is God really guiding history? Is He still in charge? Or has He abandoned us altogether?

Were it not for the reality of a sovereign God who superintends both history and humanity, we would surely despair. Thankfully, Scripture assures us the God of heaven is still in control. The real question is, Do we believe that? Daniel 4:35 proclaims, "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"

In light of the darkness around us, the prophet Isaiah delivers much-needed perspective in Isaiah 40:6-31. Open your Bible and read it for yourself, allowing his words to marinate in your mind.

MEANWHILE, AT HOME . . .

All across the world, abandoned ships rust on shores and beaches. Some are half sunken while others lie fully submerged under oceans and lakes. These are vessels that suffered shipwreck due to neglect, abandonment, or mutiny. Some were left to drift, sailing aimlessly at the unpredictable whim of the wind and the waves. Many met their fate at the

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hands of pirates. Forcibly boarding unsuspecting ships, these sea terrorists seized cargo, killing passengers and crew before either scuttling the vessel or leaving it to the ocean's mercy. Still other ships found themselves wandering upon the waters or resting on the ocean floor because of war, storms, fire, disease, a damaged rudder, or running out of fuel or food. Bad winds or no winds easily contribute to the demise of once-worthy ships. Even so, the common denominator for these ghost ships is that they are all *lost*, adrift in the ocean's vast expanse, without help or hope, and with no helmsman to guide them toward safe harbor.

Sadly, what is true of ships can also be true of people. The same perilous danger that threatens seagoing vessels also endangers those who call themselves Christians. It's why the apostle Paul admonished the Corinthians, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?"¹⁹

Peter, writing to the scattered believers living in a decadent society under the rule of a pagan government, urged, "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you."²⁰

In a world racing toward Revelation, Jesus' church today finds herself sailing through turbulent waters of her own. She's perilously taking on water while some of her more naive

passengers seem perfectly content, satisfying themselves at the weekly Sunday buffet. Mirroring the churches Christ chastised in Revelation 2–3, the collective state of Christendom today faces an internal threat far more deadly than a terrorist attack. As we will discover, the bride of Christ is not exactly “shipshape.” In places, she has suffered a hull breach, lost her rudder, failed to catch wind, and gone adrift from the course God has charted for her.

What lies dead ahead is the hidden reef of apostasy, and no one understood this more than Paul, as the much-traveled apostle suffered literal shipwreck himself three times!²¹ Using this as a powerful metaphor, he puts on display examples of *spiritual* shipwreck, even calling out individuals by name:

This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and *suffered shipwreck* in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.²²

There are several important observations and principles we can draw from Paul’s words:

1. Losing or abandoning faith is equivalent to apostasy, or suffering “shipwreck.”

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2. The two men Paul mentions weren't the only ones to abandon the faith.
3. There are tangible, painful consequences to deserting the faith.

Granted, all Christ-followers encounter storms and suffer through occasional seasons of sin. This is a normal part of the challenge and messiness of temptation and sanctification. But there is a vast difference between getting water in your boat and your boat actually sinking, and there is a big distinction between temporarily sailing off course and suffering a fatal shipwreck. The good news is that God has promised to faithfully discipline His children when they, by either active or passive choices, veer off course and straight into sin.²³ At times we may wander, sailing too close to the rocky shore and becoming stuck on those hidden reefs, yet without actually capsizing and permanently going under.

However, for others, there is no rescue from the angry sea or salvage from below. These once-professing believers may have set out on their Christian pilgrimage with good intentions and noble motives. They may have even had a correct course heading, been under great teaching, or participated in a healthy faith community. But as important as those things are, by themselves they are not enough. Thus these self-proclaimed God-followers eventually become spiritual "ghost ships" themselves. It's not an issue of losing their salvation but rather of demonstrating their true identity. They flirted with the idea of being disciples of Jesus at some point in their lives, but their eventual falling away

revealed them to be counterfeit Christians. As Jesus bluntly warned, *professing* Him, no matter how confidently, doesn't necessarily mean *possessing* Him.²⁴ This is why the Holy Spirit inspired John to write, "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."²⁵

Bottom line: people drift, falter, and sink. So do churches and even whole denominations. Having merely parroted faith in Jesus, they can, and often do, deviate off course. Some succumb to doctrinal error or, like the church at Ephesus, lose the wind in their sails, manifested in the absence of a passionate love for Jesus Christ.²⁶

This "falling away from the faith" (known as *apostasy*) can be a nebulous concept, perhaps because it's seldom studied, preached, or understood by a generation of churchgoers who measure their spiritual temperature by how much they "enjoyed" the church service and evaluate their spiritual progress by conformity to rules and religiosity. But our Christian faith goes much deeper than this. Part of maturing as believers means addressing some of the weightier issues of God's Word. As we grow, we discover that, along with all the benefits God offers (His presence; peace; provision; and steadfast, unconditional love), there are also some major concerns He has for His church, specifically, her tendency to drift, both doctrinally and personally. These dangers exist because of the world in which we live, the enemy bent on destroying us, and our own hearts that are so prone to wander.²⁷ But the closer we get to God's heart, the more

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our hearts become sensitive and open to the deeper issues God's Word addresses. We begin to want what He wants. That's part of what it means to "seek first [God's] kingdom and His righteousness."²⁸ At times we may think the really important truths and issues concerning the church are meant only for pastors and leaders. But individual Christians also have a responsibility to preserve the unity and purity of the church.²⁹ We are *all* meant to understand and "handle the truth." If not, much of Paul's epistles would be irrelevant to the average believer, something we know is not true, as "*all* Scripture is inspired by God and profitable" for us.³⁰

As this book will explain, the coming apostasy is a serious sign of the end times and one of Scripture's weightier truths. Understanding it is essential if we are to navigate the waters of today's confusing culture.

THE CAPTAIN OF OUR SALVATION

Apostasy represents an abandonment of faith, and it can happen over time without a person realizing it. In fact, just the opposite may occur, as pride mixed with false doctrine leads to an attitude of superiority, complacency, and self-righteousness. Nevertheless, it's there. Lying just beneath the surface, it is poised to penetrate the very thing keeping us afloat—our faith. Perhaps you've known those who set out seeking safe harbor in Christ only to end up splintered on the jagged rocks of unbelief. Without being moored by the biblical anchor of authentic faith, they drift in an age

of unprecedented pseudo-Christian thought. At times they are driven by the winds of progressive theology, postmodern thought, or godless philosophies and values. Perhaps they are emotionally driven by political correctness and even a reimagining of God Himself. In an era of endless information, where self-appointed truth-proclaimers peddle phony faith formulas to innocent, untrained church members, it's no surprise that many become lost in the disorienting fog. This is why every professing believer in Jesus desperately needs a magnetic compass, a map, an anchor, a lighthouse with a clear beacon—an unfailing GPS guiding them every step of the way.

It's also why we need a Captain.

Jesus promised *He* would build His church, “and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”³¹ And He has made, and will make, good on that promise. Even so, it's not enough to merely quote verses, claiming immunity from the enemy's attacks. Obviously, because of Christ's efficacious payment for sin, every believer will make it safely to heaven. But that doesn't guarantee a life exempt from sporadic episodes of apathy, self-absorption, moral failure, doctrinal deviance, or even being temporarily misled by false teachers. There is no automatic guarantee of continuous safe spiritual passage. But even in the midst of our messiness and meandering, God is still committed to us—much more committed to us than we are to Him.³² Yes, Christ will build His church. He has established her and preserved her through both history *and* heresy. And death will not defeat or permanently derail her. But that doesn't mean she isn't vulnerable to rough seas in these last

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days in which we live. There are clear and present dangers threatening her—threatening *you*, too. There are issues some may consider minor or nonessential but that still cause us to deviate from faith's map. And the longer we continue traveling off course, even if only by a few degrees, the farther from our intended destination we drift.

Pilots who miscalculate flight plans by even one degree could miss their target destinations by hundreds of miles, or worse, run straight into a mountain. Pharmacists who make just one error combining chemicals while filling a prescription could potentially poison their patients.

The same is true for us, which is why we must always strive to stay on target with God and His Word. While Christians may disagree about certain peripheral areas of doctrine, that does not in any way diminish the importance of doctrine itself. And we cannot flippantly dismiss any part of God's Word, because what we believe really does matter.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

On Jesus' final night with His disciples, they had dinner together, after which he took them on a walk to a place that was very familiar to them.³³ Located just outside Jerusalem's walls, this garden of olive trees proved to be a favorite gathering spot for Jesus and the Twelve. The word *Gethsemane* comes from two Hebrew words that when combined mean "a place for pressing oil." In ancient culture, heavy slabs of stone were used to crush olives until all the oil had been

extracted. The oil was then poured into clay jars for household use. Jesus was well aware of this common practice. He also knew what that word prefigured for Him. Arriving in the garden that night, Christ experienced a sense of dread as He contemplated being crushed by the Father's fierce wrath due to our sin. And so, securing a solitary spot, Jesus fell on His face, pouring out His heart to the Father in prayer.

In that most intimate and passionate prayer, the Son of God explicitly asks the Father *not* to take His followers out of the world but rather to “keep them from the evil one.” The reason for this, He says, is that His disciples do not belong to the domain of this world—or of its god.³⁴ But exactly how would Christ's current and future disciples remain well insulated from Satan's deceptive and destructive influence? The answer is found in the very next verse. They need only for the Father to “sanctify them in the truth,” Jesus prays. He then affirms, “Your word is truth.”³⁵

The life-changing, lasting influence of God's Word in our lives is a primary countermeasure to Satan's attacks. As Jesus' followers, we must keep this in mind when confronting the godless world in which we live. But we also must realize there are other threats too, some coming from within the church itself.

The unfortunate reality today is that the world and the church are often indistinguishable. As worldly philosophies and values infiltrate the body of Christ, moral values adjust and new theologies emerge. This creates a fatal breach, allowing other compromising half-truths and deceptive false

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teachings into the body. And why would this be such a major concern? Why is it such a big deal? Few things made Paul's blood boil more than false teachers deceiving and misleading God's people.³⁶ More about this later.

The principle we draw from Jesus' prayer is that we are purified and protected by engaging, believing, and living out God's truth. Put simply, when we think *biblically*, we are less likely to drift aimlessly. But failing to seal our minds from unbiblical thinking, beliefs, and doctrine causes us to sail perilously close to catastrophe. By adjusting Scripture to fit our own thinking (instead of vice versa), we stray from God's heart and mind. And we miss His best for us.

We've written this book for several important reasons: (1) to help you understand what apostasy is; (2) to help you understand that it's surging all around us and is a serious sign of the end times; (3) to guard you from spiritual shipwreck and the danger of sinking; and (4) to help you understand the truth so that you stay on course as you await Christ's return.

Many people today pray for a great revival, and though it may happen, no such revival is prophesied. On the contrary, according to Scripture, a great apostasy is coming.

But how close are we?