



Cults

SWEET EQUILIBRIUM: A HEALTHY, BALANCED CHRISTIAN FAITH

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(Ephesians 4:14)

It is an extraordinarily difficult quality to fake. It is beautiful to see it demonstrated in someone's life. However, it is equally obvious when it is lacking. What is it? It is a healthy, consistent, and balanced faith.

Those involved in unhealthy faith systems—whether it be a cult, a false teaching, or even excessive legalism—exude a lack of balance, which is a glaring tip-off of toxic teachings. False religions, cults, and other forms of toxic faith are generally based on an “either-or,” “black-white,” “us-them,” or “all or nothing” mentality. There is no room for compromise and no middle ground. In contrast, healthy faith accepts the fact that life is not usually black or white. Healthy faith finds balance in allowing believers to feel okay about struggling with the many gray areas of life. Toxic faith, however, labels those with sincere questions about religion as untrustworthy dissidents.

BALANCED FAITH IN ACTION

People with a healthy, balanced Christian faith draw people to Christ. They refuse to compromise the truth of God's Word, but they also refuse to put down other people's beliefs. People with healthy faith understand that many people get involved in other religions because those religions offer something appealing. The fact that so many people are involved in so many religions demonstrates the human search for truth and for connection with the Creator of the universe. Healthy believers can admire and respect the devotion demonstrated by the followers of other religions. Healthy believers can learn about other faiths and religions in order to understand their influence on people throughout the

world. For example, many world religions are very mission-minded in their attempt to share their concept of truth with others—a quality the Christian faith can appreciate.

As they learn more about other religions, healthy believers see the common thread in all other faiths—the need these faiths perceive to work one's way to God. For the adherents of these faiths, performance is everything, which is why many people of different non-Christian faiths believe that people who live good lives will gain eternal life. However, Christianity alone teaches that it is impossible to be consistently good, much less good enough to earn passage into heaven. Christianity also realizes the impossibility of comparing oneself to the example of perfection set by Jesus Christ. At this crossroads, sharing one's own experience with personal failures and inconsistencies becomes a testimony as to why Christianity is so personally appealing! Rather than working one's way to heaven, God works His way to people!

The difference in the healthy believer's approach is that they will not put down the other person's faith. Instead, they share the truth of Christianity in a tone of empathy for the human experience. Everyone is searching for truth and seeking to have some relationship with God. People with healthy faith see themselves as part of a great community in which everyone is struggling to find the truth about God,

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themselves, and others. Christians are more likely to gain an effective hearing through sharing what they have found in their own search. While people may argue with a biblical text or theological tenet, no one can deny a person's truthful testimony about an experience with Christ. A testimony can become a powerful witness to the truth of Christianity. When Christians abandon the "us versus them," unbalanced mentality, people are drawn to them and to Christ.

THE RESULTS OF BALANCED FAITH

Where healthy faith grows, every area of the believer's life improves. In the balanced practice of the Christian faith, families grow closer, friendships become stronger, and conflict is more easily resolved. Rigidity is replaced by understanding—a soothing balm in many relationships that may be bruised by misunderstandings and stalwart religious discussions. Those who grow in a healthy faith find comfort because their lives have perspective. They find wholeness in a balanced faith.

Healthy believers also find freedom from the performance review trap. Instead of engaging in a toxic struggle to somehow earn more acceptance from God by trying to appear more righteous than others, healthy Christians realize that they do not have to be perfect to be accepted. While the Pharisees desperately honed and perfected their extreme devotion to the Law, Jesus taught balance. When confronted about breaking a Sabbath law, He told His critics that the Sabbath was created for people, not people for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27).

Healthy faith is steeped in mercy. Emulating a merciful God, Christians must incorporate mercy into their views of other people as well as themselves. Mercy can heal family relationships and friendships that have been strained by the practice of

a toxic faith. A truly biblical, Spirit-filled faith will display an attractive, winsome balance that draws people in instead of driving them away.

Healthy faith is balanced in its expression. "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" (Eph. 4:14). We know we are balanced when we are tolerant and patient, able to confront without being aggressive, to be assertive without being insensitive, and to be loving yet truthful.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of cults include:

- 1 Timothy 4:6, 7
- 2 Peter 2:1-22
- 1 John 4:1-6
- 2 John 7-11
- Jude 3, 4

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on cults at Titus 1:16 on page 1614. See also the personality profile of Simon the sorcerer on page 1429.

which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior;

⁴To Titus, a true son in *our* common faith:

Grace, mercy, *and* peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ^a our Savior.

QUALIFIED ELDERS

⁵For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—⁶if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. ⁷For a bishop^a must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, ⁸but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, ⁹holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

THE ELDERS' TASK

¹⁰For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. ¹²One of them, a

prophet of their own, said, "Cretans *are* always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." ¹³This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith. ¹⁴not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. ¹⁵To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. ¹⁶They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

QUALITIES OF A SOUND CHURCH

2 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: ²that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; ³the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—⁴that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

⁶Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, ⁷in all things showing yourself

^{1:4} ^aNU-Text reads *and Christ Jesus*. ^{1:7} ^aLiterally *overseer*

KEY PASSAGE



Cults

INFILTRATORS

(1:16)

False teachers had infiltrated the church in Crete. They were claiming to be believers but undermining the gospel by teaching bad doctrine. Paul explained their error: "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him."

Today, false teachers continue to profess to know God and His word but offer incorrect teaching. Believers should know the Bible so as to perceive a false teacher quickly. Every teaching should be consistent with God's Word. Younger or immature believers, however, may be enticed by a false teacher who has style and uses appealing words. Even if believers cannot perceive an error in the teaching, Paul wrote that a false teacher's life will reveal the truth. The teacher's actions and attitudes will speak volumes about their priorities and what they really believe. We must always be discerning about the teachers we listen to. Not everything that sounds good is good for you.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about cults on pages 1552, 1553. See also the personality profile of Simon the sorcerer on page 1429.

ing on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! ²¹You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. ²²Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

²⁴Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

²⁵So when they had testified and preached

the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

CHRIST IS PREACHED TO AN ETHIOPIAN

²⁶Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. ²⁷So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Cults

SIMON THE SORCERER— THE TRAP OF FALSE RELIGION

(ACTS 8:9)

Many of the people who first heard the gospel of Jesus Christ were very religious. Strange pagan religions were plentiful. Cults whose power relied on demonic forces held many people in spiritual bondage. When the Gentiles began to believe in Jesus by the thousands, they brought with them an understanding about God that lacked the insights of the Jewish faith. Among these pagan believers was a cult leader named Simon the Sorcerer.

Philip the apostle traveled through Samaria as a one-man gospel army. He spoke and acted with God's power. The current popular religious figure was Simon, who had impressed people with his sorcery for some time. The term "sorcery" may have referred to Simon's practice of magic, use of drugs, or involvement in the occult. But even he believed Philip's message and was baptized.

When the other apostles visited and laid hands on the new believers, they received the Holy Spirit. Scripture does not report that Simon allowed the apostles to lay hands on him. Instead, he offered money in exchange for the power to lay hands on others and produce the effects of the Holy Spirit's presence.

Simon's interest in following Christ apparently revolved around what might be best for Simon's popularity. He planned to add Christ's power to his other "powers." Peter confronted Simon's ignorance and attitude, and challenged him to repent. Peter's words frightened Simon enough for him to ask for prayer, but he did not repent.

Simon represents those in every generation who think that spiritual power is simply another area of influence they can control. These self-centered people often form religious groups called cults. Cults tend to lure people into believing they can have some kind of spiritual edge or superiority over others. They are often thinly veiled efforts by evil to further corrupt humanity. Peter's words to Simon apply to cultists today, since their "heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:21). The use of Christian words and practices does not mean that a group or person is faithful to Christ.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about cults on pages 1552, 1553. See also the key passage note at Titus 1:16 on page 1614.

brethren the children of Israel. Let every man return to his house, for this thing is from the LORD. **12** Therefore they obeyed the word of the LORD, and turned back, according to the word of the LORD.

JEROBOAM'S GOLD CALVES

13 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Penuel. **14** And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: **15** If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will follow me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah."

16 Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" **17** And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. **18** Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. **19** He made shrines^a on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.

20 Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. **21** So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense.

THE MESSAGE OF THE MAN OF GOD

13 And behold, a man of God went from Judah to Bethel by the word of the LORD, and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. **2** Then he cried out against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, "O altar, altar! Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men's bones shall be burned on you.'" **3** And he gave a sign the same day, saying, "This is the sign which the LORD has spoken: Surely the altar shall split apart, and the ashes on it shall be poured out."

4 So it came to pass when King Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, who cried out against the altar in Bethel, that he stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Arrest him!" Then his hand, which he stretched out toward him, withered, so that he could not pull it back to himself. **5** The altar also was split apart, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. **6** Then the king answered and said to the man of God, "Please entreat the favor of the LORD your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me."

So the man of God entreated the LORD, and the king's hand was restored to him, and became as before. **7** Then the king said to the man of God, "Come home with me and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward."

8 But the man of God said to the king, "If you were to give me half your house, I would not go in with you; nor would I eat bread nor drink water in this place. **9** For so it was commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying,

12:31 ^aLiterally a house

SOUL NOTE



Convenient Religion (12:25-33) After Israel divided into northern and southern kingdoms, the new king in the north, Jeroboam, did not want his people traveling into the southern kingdom to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. So he made convenient worship places for them, two shrines in the northern kingdom where his people could worship golden calves. The people took advantage of this convenient religion. Today, a smorgasbord of religions is available and close at hand. But anything other than Christianity is false. Seek after God alone. **Topic: Cults**

ELIJAH'S MOUNT CARMEL VICTORY

²⁰So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. ²¹And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word. ²²Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. ²³Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. ²⁴Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God."

So all the people answered and said, "It is well spoken."

²⁵Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it."

²⁶So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made.

²⁷And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened." ²⁸So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. ²⁹And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.

³⁰Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. ³¹And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name."^a ³²Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed. ³³And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, "Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood." ³⁴Then he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time; and he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time. ³⁵So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water.

³⁶And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. ³⁷Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again."

³⁸Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!"

⁴⁰And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!" So they seized them; and Elijah brought them

18:31 ^aGenesis 32:28

SOUL NOTE



No Other God (18:26) One of the great religious confrontations of all time occurred between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Elijah had challenged the prophets of Baal to build an altar, lay a sacrifice on it, and call on their god to send fire from the sky to consume the sacrifice. No answer came. When Elijah called on the one true God, however, "the fire of the LORD fell" (18:38). There is no other God. No matter how dominant evil appears to be, no matter what foothold it is gaining, God rules supreme. **Topic: Cults**

their fathers have known. And I will send a sword after them until I have consumed them."

THE PEOPLE MOURN IN JUDGMENT

¹⁷Thus says the LORD of hosts:

"Consider and call for the mourning women,

That they may come;
And send for skillful wailing women,
That they may come.

¹⁸ Let them make haste
And take up a wailing for us,
That our eyes may run with tears,
And our eyelids gush with water.

¹⁹ For a voice of wailing is heard from Zion:
'How we are plundered!
We are greatly ashamed,
Because we have forsaken the land,
Because we have been cast out of our dwellings.'

²⁰ Yet hear the word of the LORD,
O women,
And let your ear receive the word of His mouth;
Teach your daughters wailing,
And everyone her neighbor a lamentation.

²¹ For death has come through our windows,
Has entered our palaces,
To kill off the children—*no longer to be outside!*
And the young men—*no longer on the streets!*

²² Speak, "Thus says the LORD:
'Even the carcasses of men shall fall as refuse on the open field,

Like cuttings after the harvester,
And no one shall gather them.'"

²³Thus says the LORD:

"Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom,

Let not the mighty *man* glory in his might,

Nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches;

²⁴ But let him who glories glory in this,
That he understands and knows Me,
That I *am* the LORD, exercising
lovingkindness, judgment, and
righteousness in the earth.

For in these I delight," says the LORD.

²⁵"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will punish all *who are* circumcised with the uncircumcised—²⁶Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all *who are* in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all *these nations are* uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel *are* uncircumcised in the heart."

IDOLS AND THE TRUE GOD

10 Hear the word which the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel.

²Thus says the LORD:

"Do not learn the way of the Gentiles;
Do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven,

For the Gentiles are dismayed at them.

³ For the customs of the peoples *are* futile;
For *one* cuts a tree from the forest,
The work of the hands of the workman,
with the ax.

⁴ They decorate it with silver and gold;
They fasten it with nails and hammers
So that it will not topple.

SOUL NOTE



The Physical and the Spiritual (9:25, 26) Without inward devotion to God, the act of circumcision is about as spiritually meaningful as a haircut. Using outward symbols as evidence of spiritual superiority goes against everything God says in His Word. Anything to which people point with pride to symbolize their spirituality or to set them apart from others is, in reality, a stumbling block to their growth. People may look at the outward appearance, "but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). **Topic: Cults**

GREETING

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

GOD'S FINAL JUDGMENT AND GLORY

³We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, ⁴so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, ⁵which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; ⁶since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, ⁷and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, ¹⁰when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe,^a because our testimony among you was believed.

¹¹Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹²that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE GREAT APOSTASY

2 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ²not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ^a had come. ³Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin^a is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God^a in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

⁵Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. ⁷For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He^a who now restrains *will do so* until He^b is taken out of the way. ⁸And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. ⁹The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, ¹⁰and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, ¹²that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

STAND FAST

¹³But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord,

1:10 ^aNU-Text and M-Text read *have believed*.
2:2 ^aNU-Text reads *the Lord*. **2:3** ^aNU-Text reads *lawlessness*. **2:4** ^aNU-Text omits *as God*. **2:7** ^aOr *he* ^bOr *he*

SOUL NOTE



Truth Grip (2:9-12) One day a "lawless one" will arise and, empowered by Satan, will deceive many people. Those who "did not receive the love of the truth" and who "believe the lie" will be lost forever. Satan always seeks to deceive—but a ton of truth with an ounce of a lie is still a lie. Many false religions flirt at the edges of the truth and sound good. But any religion that teaches salvation by any other way than through Jesus Christ is a deception. We must hold tight to the truth we have been taught so as not to be deceived. **Topic: Cults**

selves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.

THE GREAT MYSTERY

¹⁴These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; ¹⁵but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. ¹⁶And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:

God^a was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,

THE GREAT APOSTASY

¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ²speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if

3:16 ^aNU-Text reads *Who*

SOUL NOTE



Satan's Lies (4:1-3) False teachers abound today as they did in Paul's day. They may teach that god is in nature, or that god is found within oneself. Others may teach that God wants people to be rich or that He will not judge anyone. But any teaching that is contrary to God's Word is a lie. When people follow these

teachings, they are "giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons." Believers have to be on guard against the subtleties of false teaching, and we need to check every teaching against the truth in God's Word. **Topic: Cults**

KEY PASSAGE



Adolescent Development

SENSIBLE ADOLESCENCE

(4:7)

Adolescence is a time of great change. Young people transform from children into adults, gaining independence from their parents and moving toward life on their own. During this time, some young people rebel against authority, committing sins with consequences that last a lifetime. But it need not be that way.

Paul borrowed athletic words to describe spiritual growth. Whether new to the faith or raised in it from childhood, young people can "exercise" themselves toward godliness. To live a godly life during turbulent and uncertain adolescent years takes self-control, commitment, and continual work. As in working out for a sport, the Christian life requires daily work. Young people can develop spiritually through this time by entrusting their temptations, desires, frustrations, fears, and future to God. He cares about every part of their lives. Parents can help by praying for their children and maintaining open communication. The time of change can be exciting and rewarding for both the parents and the children who keep God front and center.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about adolescent development on pages 1104, 1105. See also the personality profile of Daniel on page 1102.

GREETING THE ELECT LADY

The Elder,

¹To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, ²because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:

³Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you⁴ from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

WALK IN CHRIST'S COMMANDMENTS

⁴I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received

commandment from the Father. ⁵And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. ⁶This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

BEWARE OF ANTICHRIST DECEIVERS

⁷For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an

³ ³NU-Text and M-Text read *us*.

SOUL NOTE

One Truth (1-4) One truth exists, and that truth is found in Jesus Christ, who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). John wrote this letter to help believers remain in the truth and not stray into false teachings. In order to resist false notions and ideas, believers must remain grounded in God's Word. When we know the Bible, we learn the truth and will see when any teaching contradicts it. We must continue "walking in truth," for then we will be able to see what is false and steer clear of it. **Topic: Truth**

SOUL NOTE

Love Revealed (6) Loving God means obeying Him. When we love God, we desire to "walk according to His commandments," meaning that we want to obey Him. That obedience reveals our love for Him. Love for God doesn't focus merely on feelings, although those certainly are involved; it's about what we do. God's commandments are found in His Word. We obey not because we are trying to be good enough to be saved or to have a certain amount of good deeds to outweigh bad deeds. We obey because we love God and desire to please Him. **Topic: Obedience**

SOUL NOTE

True or False? (7) Jesus had warned that false teachers would arise and lead many people astray (Matt. 7:15; 24:11, 24). False teachers will teach any number of doctrines that might sound good but are contradictory to God's Word and, therefore, are lies. Believers can discern false teaching by discovering what the teacher believes about Jesus Christ. Some will teach that Jesus did not actually come in the flesh; others will teach that Jesus was merely flesh and not God. If anyone contradicts the Bible's definition of Christ being both human and divine, then that person is a false teacher. **Topic: Cults**