



Know the Heretics

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There is a lot of talk about heresy these days. The frequency and volume of accusations suggest that some Christians have lost a sense of the gravity of the word. On the other hand, many believers have little to no familiarity with orthodox doctrine or the historic distortions of it. What's needed is a strong dose of humility and restraint, and also a clear and informed definition of orthodoxy and heresy. *Know the Heretics* provides an accessible 'travel guide' to the most significant heresies throughout Christian history.

As a part of the KNOW series, it is designed for personal study or classroom use, but also for small groups and Sunday schools wanting to more deeply understand the foundations of the faith. Each chapter covers a key statement of faith and includes a discussion of its historical context; a simple explanation of the unorthodox teaching, the orthodox response and a key defender; reflections of contemporary relevance; and discussion questions.

Know the Heretics Details

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From Reader Review Know the Heretics for online ebook

Jon Pentecost says

Brief overview of 12 different heresies throughout church history.

Holcomb does an admirable job of concisely discussing historical context, theological significance, and applying the error to today. He makes it very accessible. He tells the stories well, and highlights the key biblical issues clearly. For a book focused on recording and warning against heretical beliefs, it is actually quite positive in tone.

At some points the history feels a little reductionist, but much better than often happens in books written to be clear accessible discussions of historical events. At times, the way he discusses issues related to divine immutability/impassibility sound strange. Not sure if he was trying to avoid the issue in such a brief book, or if he disagrees with patristic views on the matter.

Mike says

I used this as the basis for a high school Sunday school class.

Josiah Richardson says

Covering the majority of the major heretics for a decent overview. Enough for a small taste of the topic but will leave you wishing there was more.

Hopson says

Fantastic little book on major heretical teachings in church history. Too many Christians are woefully ignorant concerning the theological errors that have plagued the church since the ascension of Christ. Sadly, we are poorly equipped to resist reincarnations of heretical teaching today, largely because we're so ignorant of the past. This little book is an easy-to-read, short, clear work that goes a long way to help remind us where we've been. I could see this book (and some of the other works in this series) being helpfully turned into a Sunday School course on church history. Highly recommend this one.

Angel says

Originally published in angelroman.org

Last year I started to read about church history, from the Apostles in the book of Acts to the Protestant Reformation. Among Roman emperors, church theology and famous theologians I read a few stuff about heresies in the church so when I saw this book I knew I had to read it.

Know the Heretics its a great book because of mainly two things:

First, Holcomb did a great job reuniting in a small and accessible volume the main heresies of church history. You will find some that may be known to you like the old teachings of the Judaizers. But there are also other beliefs that were held by other religious figures like Mani, who believed he was the promised Paraclete. Or those who followed the Docetism movement, and believed Jesus was fully divine while he was on earth and his physical being was just an appearance.

Being a short book, each chapter presents a single heretic and it's divided presenting its historical background, the heretical teaching, the orthodox response and the contemporary relevance.

And second, one of the conclusions I came up after reading and learning some church history is that you get to value and to understand something even more when you get identified with its past. Knowing more about church as the body of Christ and even knowing about the heresies in its past will make you be grateful with God and with those who fought for what was right. This book does an excellent at not only describing and giving you historical facts, but also telling you the importance for you to know such information.

I recommend this book not only for those looking to learn a good lesson about history but also to those willing to stand for what is right by getting to know the heroes of our past.

Rating: ★★★★★

I received this book for free from the Booklook Bloggers program for this review. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own.

C. Varn says

While it may not be as rare as generation or two ago, reading a Episcopal Protestant with reform leanings writing on Patristic Christology is quite interesting. This perspective enables one to see the Protestant relationship to the "creedal" early church. This book focuses on 12 heresies as way of explaining the Orthodox point of view--from a reformed perspective. Holcomb uses both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox explications of the Patristic writings in his works cited, so his view, while definitely reformed, seems very much ecumenical in spirit. Most of the 12 heresies are either ante-nicene or the Christological heresies which concerned the first four ecumenical councils. The exception is the chapter on Socinus, all of these are heresies of the early church.

Holcomb's reformed Episcopal theological leanings are clearest when he writes about the Judaizers. Another point where the Protestant leanings are clear is Holcomb's not mentioning that both Tertullian and Origen, while key church fathers, were both anathematized. Tertullian himself succumbed to the Montanism heresy, which while not a Christological dispute, did have serious implications for proto-Catholic/Orthodox views of forgiveness. Origen was anathematized after his universalism, and his accidental but historical connection to Arianism (which Holcomb does actually admit). Finally, using Socinus as a major heresy is indicative of a relationship to the reformed tradition. While Polish and Transylvanian Unitarianism does lead to modern Unitarianism and Unitarian-Universalism, it is a minor moment in Christian history whose main ideas can be found in other heretical movements. It, however, is particularly significant in Reformed history.

Another issue with the book is that a small chapter on Gnosticism may be over-ambitious. Gnosticism being

such a huge category, and one where there are significant disagreements in both historical and even orthodox Christian circles as to what technically belongs to the category. The various issues with Gnosticism are hard to pin down in such a short chapter. Gnostic tendencies to re-emerge in late antiquity and in the medieval period add to the protean nature of the category.

Still, despite these criticisms, I find this book to be honest about what the Orthodox point of view from the perspective of the credal churches--most Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox--actually state they believe. In any age of religious illiteracy in general, this sort of education perspective is important even if one is not only not reformed, but perhaps not even a Christian. It packs a fair amount of analysis and history in under 200 pages, and, for that alone, I give it a high recommendation.

K B says

This is a great resource and I recommend it to all comers. What you don't know about heretical thinking CAN HURT YOU.

Troy Neujahr says

Concise overviews that are yet of sufficient depth and scope as to be beneficial. *Know the Heretics* runs through a number of the Christian church's most important heresies while neither neglecting the socio-historical context nor becoming encumbered with overly technical theological language. A beneficial resource for both the Christian home and the pastor's office.

Justin says

This is an excellent guide to 12 major heresies, with chapters carefully organized for context, wrong teaching, orthodox response, and contemporary relevance. The writing's clear and concise, and the organization makes it usable as a quick reference.

Minor aside: the chapters on Eutyches and Nestorius could have been switched in order for a little clarity, and some of the Eutyches chapter could have used better explanations, but only a little.

This one's definitely worth a read to anyone who's at all interested.

Jason Kanz says

Do you think you would recognize a heretic? Does that phrase even have any contemporary relevance in our pluralistic society? Justin Holcomb's *Know the Heretics* (2014) likely will be a useful resource for the church to help us to understand these questions. Weighing in at a short and very accessible 156 pages, *Know the Heretics* presents the basics of a dozen well-known heresies through the history of the church. In each case, he explores the background, heretical teaching, orthodox response, and contemporary relevance.

Taking the opening questions out of order, we must ask does heresy have any relevance today? I know many people who would argue that heresy is not only an irrelevant, but a frankly intolerant, term. To refer to someone as a heretic is to say that they are wrong about some foundational biblical truth and to say someone is wrong is to be judgmental. In modern society, intolerance is the unforgivable sin, but in the early church, believers painstakingly committed themselves to proclaiming, clarifying, and defending the truth, which Holcomb shows us along the way in this book. Holcomb is right to clarify that heresy does not mean "everyone who disagrees with me" but has to do with foundational beliefs of the faith. I wish the church today would take a stronger stand for these foundational biblical truths rather than being blown around by every wind of doctrine.

My initial question was, "do you think you would recognize a heretic?" Unfortunately, I believe the answer would be "no" for many people in the church today. I would imagine that the majority of church goers today would be unable to differentiate between modalist, a Mormon, and a Trinitarian Christian.

Holcomb opened the concluding chapter by quoting GK Chesterton, who wrote "the disadvantage of men not knowing the past is that they do not know the present." How many Christians would recognize that the ever popular image of the Trinity as being like water (ice, water, steam) is reminiscent of Sabellianism, which is one of the most well known forms of modalist heresy (p. 84). In fact, how many Christians know what modalism is and why it is important? How many people would recognize that the theology of Michael and Debi Pearl, authors of the surprisingly popular *To Train Up a Child*, appears to be Pelagian? Pelagius was a heretic who said many things, but one of them was his rejection of original sin. How many of us would recognize the roots of these ancient heresies in contemporary thinking, or even that they are something worth fighting for?

I am grateful for godly men and women throughout the history of the church who were willing to fight long and hard for orthodox biblical teaching. I am also grateful for those like Justin Holcomb who believe these issues are important enough for "common" (i.e., not the academic type) believers to continue to think through.

Truth matters. We need more books like this one to help the church see that it does.

I received this book free from the publisher through the BookLook Bloggers book review bloggers program. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Mary Cornelius says

What a handy little guide to the heretics. Cleared up all manner of confusion in my little head.

Jen says

This book is not an exhaustive listing of all of the heresies out there, it is a sampling of the more major ones, with an explanation of the heresy, the history and the main person behind it, the orthodoxy response, the importance of the heresy and the response today and a list for further reading after each section.

The book was laid out in a very reader-friendly way. Religious non-fiction can be dry, lengthy and boring. This book managed to easily dodge each of those pitfalls.

This was going to be a 4.5 star book, rounded down, BUT I realized that it earned a full five stars because it not only caused me to learn something, it ALSO led me down the rabbit hole of "I don't know anything about this thing, now I need to learn about it!". So now I'm going to try to find out more about Original Sin. It's not something that was focused on much when I was in Sunday School (not Catholic, so all I know is it's cause Adam and Eve fell by disobeying God. Maybe that's all it is, but I don't know.) Original Sin is a subject that was one of the contentions in a heresy and was the only heresy that I didn't fully understand the issue at hand. So something requiring more study by me to be sure.

So this book gave me what I was looking for, I learned more about something I didn't know that much about and it led me to further study.

My thanks to NetGalley and Zondervan Academic for an eARC copy of this book to read and review.

Charlie says

This is a great book to better understand how the heresies of the past caused Christians to develop sound biblical theology. It also is eye opening to see how these heresies in different forms are creeping into the church today. The author gives a relevance to the church today at the end of each chapter. We need to keep in mind the struggle for Orthodox teaching and encourage one another to be guardians of the Gospel!

Shawn Durham says

This book is amazing

Josh says

Excellent little book. Concise, but of sufficient depth on 12 key heresies in the history of Christian doctrine.
