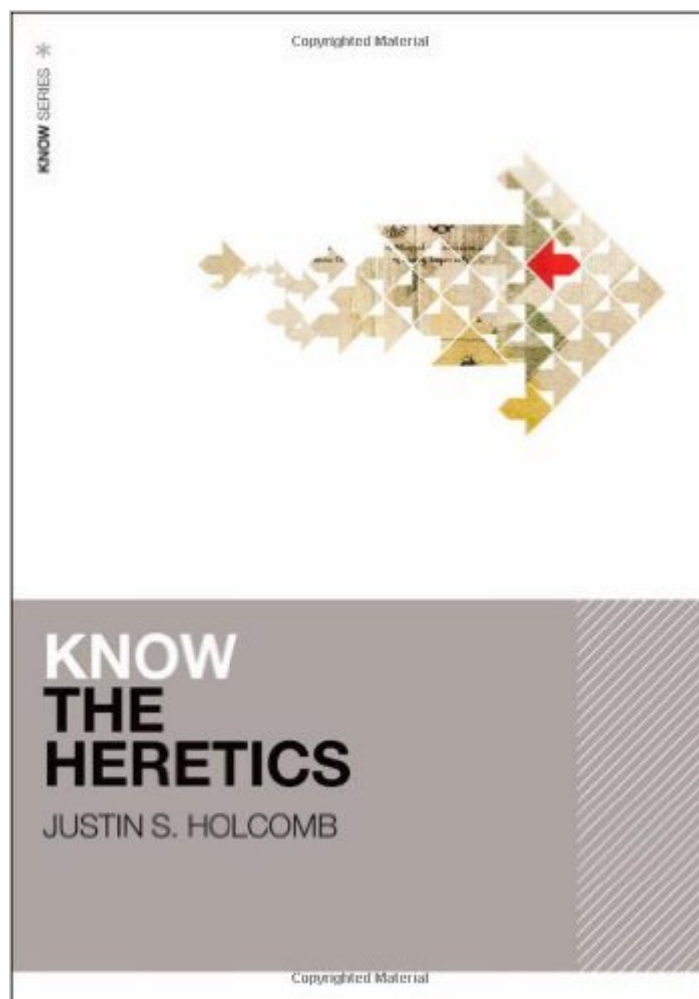


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# Know The Heretics (KNOW Series)



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Heretic” is one of those words we struggle to use well. Often times, you see it used in one of two ways—either liberally or ironically. One equates all disagreement with apostasy, the other pretends disagreement doesn't matter at all. Both rob the word of its power. Justin Holcomb understands the seriousness of heresy and what it means to call someone a heretic—it is a weighty charge that [is] not made lightly, nor [is] it used whenever there [is] theological inaccuracy or impression” (14). So how do we learn to use this word wisely? By knowing what heresy really is.

And so, we have Holcomb's newly released *Know the Heretics*. This short book introduces readers to several heresies that have threatened the church throughout history, and how the controversies surrounding each—whether it be the requirement to obey the Law, the existence of original sin, or the Trinity itself—helped shape the church as it is today. It's tempting to pretend that ancient heresies don't matter anymore because, well, they're ancient. But this tendency is our chronological snobbery at work. We like to think we're beyond the problems of the ancient world; that because we are so much more advanced, we couldn't possibly fall prey to the same errors our spiritual forbearers did. You know what they say about those who ignore the past, right? That's why we need a book like this one. This book is a case study of fourteen major events when the church made the right call—not for political or status reasons—but because orthodox teaching preserved Jesus' message in the best sense, and the new teaching distorted it. • Holcomb writes (12). These case studies confront readers with our core problem: apathy. Take Sabellianism—a form of Modalism—for example.

[Note: This book has been provided free of charge by BookLook/Zondervan Press in exchange for an honest review.] Generally speaking, a book about heresy is the cause for a great deal of chest-thumping and hostility, but this is a rare example of a book about heresy that attempts a very difficult task in marshaling support against certain heresies (by name, this book comments on Gnostics, liberal Christianity, Mormons, and Unitarians as heretical in either one aspect or another), while at the same time holding heresy in such a high regard that the term is not tossed around for anyone who disagrees with orthodox positions but who holds to what the author considers to be a reasonable test of orthodoxy—the holding to the Nicene Creed (presumably with its later additions about the Trinity) and to a general acceptance of the various ecumenical councils of post-Nicene Hellenistic Christianity. While there is a lot that I disagree with in this book, I must honor the noble intent of the author to be nuanced and moderate and yet passionate about better knowing God, while pointing out the pitfalls that led various people into heresy while dealing with such people and the deeply political nature of Christianity at the time in a fair fashion. As a very short guidebook to some of the most essential heresies in Christianity, this book sticks mostly to early heresies (all of the heresies included began in the first five centuries AD, with one exception: the unitarian heresy of Socinus), and most of these heresies deal with one of two subjects: the nature of God or the nature of salvation (or some combination between the two).

I enjoyed reading this book very much and recommend it for use in adult education programs in

Christian churches and to anyone interested in Christian theology or church history. The author is an Episcopal priest who appears to be an adjunct professor at two Protestant seminaries in Florida. This book is part of a series he is publishing called "the Know Series," the other volume of which is "Know the Creeds and Councils." The persons endorsing the series on the book flap are heavyweights in the evangelical and reformed communities, including Michael Horton, Carl Trueman, Scot McKnight, and James K.A. Smith. This volume includes fourteen case studies of how the church responded to the challenge of unorthodox thinking from the time of the Apostles through the 17th century. The author presents the historical background of each heresy, articulates its particulars, outlines the orthodox response, and attempts to describe the continuing relevance of the conflict for the modern church. The strengths of the book are many. It is very readable and mostly understandable in a single reading by someone without theological training. The chapters are mostly short (around ten pages, except for the chapter on Manicheism, which needs to be shortened and/or edited) and are just about the right length for weekly reading and consideration in the time usually allotted to adult education in parishes. The author is a very engaging writer and tells the story of each heresy in a way that will attract most educated readers. This book, as well as the series itself, is quite welcome to those of us trying to plan education in parishes and have tired of searching for intelligent, orthodox resources for adults. The book has its weaknesses, though, and they are not insignificant.

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