

Contend Earnestly For the Faith Which Was Once For All Handed Down to the Saints

An Expository Study of the **Epistle of Jude**

Chapter 6- The History of Heresy **Jude 4**

41. The History of Heresy Part 11

WOSM Wednesday 01/02/08

Welcome again my beloved in Jesus Christ. We are continuing our verse by verse Journey through the Epistle of **Jude** and today I want to continue our examination of The History of Heresy by looking again at the fourth verse of Jude- so let's read that verse again together:

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now we have been studying about the men who fulfilled Jude's warning here in this verse and who crept into the Church in the first century who brought in false teachings about Grace. We have looked at both the Antinomians and the Judaizers who were the twin evils who attacked the glorious Grace of God. We saw how that the Antinomians *abused* Grace while the Judaizers or the legalists *ignored* the Grace of God. We also saw how that both of these groups attacked the Church very soon after the creation of the Church and so they were actually mentioned in the Canon of Scripture.

Now today, we need to move on to the third group, who also attacked the Church while the NT was being compiled. This group is known as the "Gnostics" and, like both the heresy of the Antinomians and the Judaizers, the heresy of Gnosticism is very serious and very much alive in our day.

Gnosticism is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the heresy of the Judaizers. The legalism of the Judaizers was a synthesis of Pharisaical Judaism. It was an attempt to blend

Christianity with the religion of the Pharisees. But Gnosticism was just the opposite. It was an attempt to blend Christianity with pagan philosophy.

While the Judaizers stubbornly clung to the past- the Gnostics completely threw away the past. The Judaizers and the Antinomians attacked the Church from within but the Gnostics attacked the Church from without. So in many ways- the error of the Gnostics was exactly the opposite of the error of the Judaizers. This shows us a pattern that we can gage today- that much of heresy swings from one extreme to the other.

So, while the error of both the Antinomian and the Legalists was being defeated in the Church- they were defeated by the constant vigilance and patient teaching of the Apostolic Fathers of the Church- at the same time, the devil brought in another heresy which had to be dealt with- called Gnosticism- which had to be dealt with the same way.

Unlike the Antinomians and the Legalists- ancient Gnosticism is a bit hard to define. It is about as hard to define as is the modern so-called “New Age Movement”, which in fact is not new at all- but is really just old fashioned paganism. But both ancient Gnosticism and the New Age Movement have a lot in common and are equally as hard to define. Both are complex religious systems and not simple. There is not one single New Age religion- there is a whole collection of them- and the same thing is true about Gnosticism.

There isn’t just one type of Gnosticism- there is a whole variety of Gnostic cults that sprang up in the first century and which are still alive today.

Both Gnosticism and the New Age Movement suggest that Divine Wisdom lies hidden in deep dark mysteries that can only be revealed to certain enlightened followers, which is how they got their name. The Gnostics got their name from the Greek word, *gnosis*, which means “knowledge” or “to know”. Now while the Greeks were famous for seeking after knowledge- the type of knowledge that the Gnostics sought after was not the knowledge of mathematics, or science, or architecture, but was an *experiential* knowledge of God and the Divine.

Gnostic believed that true Salvation was not obtained through repentance and trusting in the finished Work of Jesus Christ, but the

Gnostics taught that true Salvation was obtained by “*receiving*” or by “*experiencing*” this hidden knowledge that is way beyond what is revealed to us in Scripture and which ordinary people could never receive. The Gnostics believed and taught that the real Truth about God was buried in “codes” and elaborately hidden “secrets” that could only be revealed to the chosen few.

So, if you think about it, Mormonism, Christian Science, and the New Age Movement are all modern forms of the ancient heresy of Gnosticism. All of these current false religions suggest that the real key to understanding Divine Truth; the real pathway to Salvation is buried in special “codes” or “keys” in mystical writings other than the Bible and which have to be “unlocked” or deciphered by special chosen people.

In the false Christianity of Christian Science that other book is called, *Science and Health with Keys to the Scriptures*; in the false cult of Mormonism, those other books are: *The Book of Mormon*; *Doctrines and Covenants*; and *the Pearl of Great Price*. All of these spurious writings are what they call- “other revelations of Jesus Christ” which contain special information about Jesus that is not found in inspired Scripture. In the New Age Movement- this special knowledge comes from a variety of sources namely an “inner light” that guides them into what they call “Knowledge”. All of these things are classic Gnostic ideas.

Gnosticism has its beginnings in worldly philosophies and then migrated into the Christian Church as the Church was developing. This is why Jude uses the language that he does here to describe just how this heresy came into the Church. Jude says in verse 4:

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now the term, “**crept in**” that Jude uses here literally means that these heretics snuck in; they came into the Church disguised as believers; they crept into the Church under the radar while the leadership of the Church was asleep and apathetic and not watching. These men put on a show that they were true believers, but in reality, they were ungodly men who came into the Church to destroy it.

Notice also in this verse that Jude says that these men were **long beforehand marked out for this condemnation** by God because they tried to change the Grace of God into something sensual and sexual and perverted and they also attacked the Deity of Christ; the Sovereignty of God and the purpose of the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

You see, even in the early Church, there were some who thought it was a good idea for Christians to adapt themselves to worldly philosophies and to try to blend in with the lost world. So, these people welcomed Gnosticism with open arms.

Gnosticism had the ability to mutate itself into various forms so that as one version of Gnosticism was defeated by the watchmen of the Church- another form would rise to take its place. This is why in many of the Gnostic writings that we have uncovered, you can see the hostility that the Church had for these people and the disdain in which the Gnostics viewed the early Christians.

The Christian Church did not view the Gnostics as friends. They didn't look at the Gnostics as sincere but misguided souls. No, the Church viewed the Gnostics as the enemies of the Cross and as ungodly people who were trying to pervert the Gospel and who were working very hard to destroy Biblical Christianity.

The Gnostics looked down their noses at the early believers in the same pompous and self righteous way that many pseudo-intellectual liberals do today and they viewed the Christians as ignorant people who were hopelessly naïve and they viewed the people of God as being oppressed by the chauvinistic superstitions of the men who were the stewards of the House of God. The Church viewed the Gnostics as emissaries of satan who were heretics and evil men.

So we can see that the battle between the Church and the false gospel of Gnosticism was not gentile; neither was it laid back- but the battle against Gnosticism in the Church was waged heavy and hard by the men whom God had called to earnestly contend for the Faith.

We can see that in the Biblical account of this war, that it was primarily the Apostle John whom God used to defend the Faith against the heresy of the Gnostics. John wrote many things to combat their teachings and attempts at perverting the right way of the Lord.

After the Canon of Scripture was completed and the Revelation of God to Man was finished and the Bible was formulated- Gnosticism continued to plague the Church for another six hundred years.

When Gnosticism first arose- it took the Christian world by storm. And Biblical Christianity survived only because the men whom God had called to raise up the Church were willing to confront this heresy head on. I wish I could tell you that we have that same courage today in the Church- but the courage to buck popular opinion and to go against the wave of the plague of so-called tolerance in order to do and say and teach that which God has spoken is in very short supply today.

John was clear and brutal in his denunciation of Gnostic teachings and of the Gnostic heretics themselves. Under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, John wrote to the Church to tell them how to deal with those who followed Gnosticism in **2John 9-11:**

9 Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting;

11 for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

John recognized that by reading what the Gnostics wrote and by listening to what the Gnostics said was going to deceive some in the Church- so God inspired John to write this warning to the Church to not let the Gnostics into their homes, nor to give them a greeting.

I think that it is fascinating that if John were alive today- he would be visited by members of the local clergy association to try to get John to be more loving and kind to these sweet and sincere Gnostics. John would be rebuked as being divisive; hard; mean; unloving; unkind; unchristian and a host of other condemnations- all because he saw the clear threat of Gnosticism and spoke out correctly and forcefully against it. What we have to remember here, my Christian brothers and sisters, is that what John wrote here may well seem hard to us today- but it didn't come from Man; this didn't even come solely from John- we must remember that John was moved upon by the Holy Spirit to pen this down and we need to fear God and we need to obey God's Word and we need to take heed to this apostolic command today.

It is precisely because of the heresy of the Gnostics that by the second century- the Lord raised up men whom we know today as “the apologists”. These men took their name from the Greek word that meant, “to defend”. The apologists defended the Christian Faith against all attacks both from within and without the Church. Men like Irenaeus, Tertullian, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr. These men rose to fame because they fought eloquently against the heresy of Gnosticism.

So what I want to remind all of us is that if our understanding of Christianity is that we are not to defend it against attacks by heretics such as the Gnostics; if we believe that to reject false teaching is somehow unchristian; if we think that to stand against lies and subversion of Truth by the devil is somehow unloving or unkind or unchristlike- then you have a warped understanding of historic and Biblical Christianity. The Bible is clear and the history of the Church is clear. We are commanded by Scripture to stand against all heresy. We are obligated by apostolic commands to reject any teaching from any man which isn't Biblical. We not only have the right, but we have the responsibility to denounce and cry out against false teaching from any man; any church; any organization; any council; any one- including an angel from heaven- if what they write or teach or say is contrary to the Word of God.

Listen to me, my dear friends, we are told to be gentle to all men- even those with whom we disagree. But no where in the Bible does it say or teach that we are to tolerate heresy. We are not to tolerate it; or accept it; or listen to it; or learn anything from it. We are not to accept heresy as simply being another opinion; or a disagreement; or a personal preference. Heresy by definition is a lie. It comes from the devil, who is the father of lies. Heresy is never meant to enlighten or inform anyone. Heresy is evil and wicked and is blasphemy and poison to our soul. Heresy is designed to confuse and destroy the Church by corrupting the Doctrines of the Church.

So, we must repent and we must return to our first love and to rise up in our most holy Faith and we must earnestly contend for the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints.

Well, I'm out of time for today- but please join me on the next broadcast as we continue our Journey through the Epistle of **Jude**. May God help us all.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.