

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**

51. The History of Heresy Part 21

WOSM Wednesday 01/16/08

Welcome again my brothers and sisters in Christ. We are continuing our verse by verse study of the Epistle of **Jude** and today I want to continue our examination of The History of Heresy by looking at the fourth verse of Jude- so let's read verse 4 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 are continuing to study about who these "certain persons" that Jude talks about here in verse 4 really were by studying the seven major groups of heresy. And we have already covered the Antinomians, the Judaizers, the Gnostics, and the Modalists. And now we are continuing in our study of one of the most important times of the Christian Church- a time when the Church nearly lost its understanding of the Deity of Jesus Christ and when heresy nearly destroyed the Gospel. This is what the heresy of Arianism was all about.

And we left off last time by me introducing the rest of the cast of this real life drama that captivated the Christian Church in the fourth century. Here are those six men that played major roles in the Arian Controversy:

Arius- the presbyter of the Church in Alexandria who began the error and who gave it its name.

Alexander, the bishop of the Church in Alexandria who excommunicated Arius for teaching against the Deity of Jesus Christ.

Constantine, the Roman Emperor who had converted to Christianity and who wanted this division within the Church to be solved.

Then we have two men who had the same name. **Eusebius**, the historian, who wrote about this time in Church history.

Eusebius, the Arian, who was in league with Arius to take over the Church

And then we have the hero of this story- **Athanasius**, who almost single handedly rescued the Church from the error of the Arians.

And as I told you last time, the Church was at a time when no one really had the nerve or the wherewithal to fight off another doctrinal challenge by another group of heretics. Constantine had just issued the Edict of Milan, which in effect ended 300 years of persecution against the Church almost overnight. Christianity went from being an illegal and resisted religion to the state religion of Rome almost immediately.

This had the effect of causing many in the Church to have no heart for contending for the faith and an attitude of just going along to get along permeated the Christian Church. This made the Church ripe for heresy to enter in and take over- which it did.

Arius was now teaching boldly and regularly that Jesus was more than a man- but less than God. This had the effect of denying Jesus' full Divinity. And the controversy centered around one letter of one Greek word used by the Church to describe Jesus' relationship with the Father.

The Church had used the Greek word, *homoousia* to describe Jesus' relation to God the Father. Homoousia was a combination of two words, "homo"- meaning: *the same* and "ousia" meaning: *substance or essence*. So, the official position of the Church late in the third century was the Jesus was *homoousia* with the Father- or in other words- that Jesus was of the same Substance or the same Essence as the Father.

This teaching confirmed the Doctrine of the Trinity which says that God is one in Essence, but is eternally manifested in three Persons of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

But Arius said, "*Not so.*" Arius added one letter- the letter "I" which in Greek was the "iota" to the word, homoousia and made the word to be *homoiousia*, which was the combination of the words, "homoi"- which meant: *similar* and "ousia" which meant: *substance*.

So by adding one letter to just one word, Arius was teaching that Jesus was of a similar but entirely different substance or Essence as the Father. This error had the effect of removing Christ's Deity and made Jesus to be a "created being" rather than what the Bible said that He was. Let's look at a very familiar passage that underlies what was at stake here. Let's look at **John 1:1**:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was the most unique Person in all human history. The Bible says unashamedly that Christ was God. He wasn't almost God, but not quite; He wasn't an angelic being no, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was God Himself wrapped in human flesh.

Arius was teaching that this was not true. Arius taught that Jesus was similar to God but was, in fact, a created being which God had created at some point after Creation.

After years of trying to reason with Arius, Alexander finally convened a Church Council and had Arius formally excommunicated.

And this is what you have to do with heretics. You must and you should try to reason with them; with much effort and tears, you should plead with them and try to bring them back to Scriptural Truth. You must try to correct their thinking and encourage them to believe what God has revealed in the Bible about that issue- but sooner or later you have to come to terms with the fact that most heretics are not sincere but wayward men; they are not nice people who are just a little off base in their Doctrine- no, true blue heretics always have been and are today exactly what the Bible says that they are- ravening wolves in sheep's clothing who creep into the Church with damnable heresies with the stated intention of destroying the Church. So as a leader in the House of God- your options are very limited.

You can either allow people who do not believe the Bible to go ahead and teach false doctrine and deceive the sheep in your church, or you have to stop them. That is really the only two choices you have. If you don't think that it matters what we believe, then go ahead and entrust the souls of your congregation to these people that Jude said were ungodly men. But if you think that the souls of the people that

you are responsible for are valuable and precious in the eyes of God, then you have to stand up against these people and stop them.

Then you will be labeled as dictatorial, autocratic, unloving and mean spirited- which is to say that you are right. To choose to ignore them is to allow the problem to grow larger and to allow the infection of false teaching to touch and harm more people. You haven't solved anything by ignoring heresy- you will still have to deal with the issue later on- but by ignoring it and allowing the heresy to grow and take root- all you have accomplished is that now the problem is much harder and much bigger and will do much more damage when you do decide to act.

And one of the most important tools that you can have at your disposal in these cases is to have a written Doctrinal Statement that is detailed and lays out exactly what you believe and teach and which has been unanimously approved by the leaders of your Church. This Doctrinal Statement should have several components to it. It should be 100% Scriptural and it should be detailed. Without this, you have nothing to appeal to when heretics come knocking on your door.

If your Doctrinal Statement is purposely vague, or is based upon human reasoning; worldly wisdom; pragmatism; and personal opinions- then you will have gaps and holes which will be easily exploited by those whom satan has sent to your church to tear it up.

Stop and think about this for a moment. Those who genuinely love the Lord don't want to believe or teach anything that isn't True. Part of being saved is that God has placed within your heart the desire to do what is pleasing in His sight. Now we don't always *succeed* in doing right, but we always *want to*, and we don't want to teach error; we don't want to believe a lie; and we have no desire to lead anyone astray.

But in every area of our beliefs and teaching where we get off base; where we stray from the revealed Truth of Scripture; where we either add to or take away from that which God has said- we are opening the door to the enemy to come in and exploit that.

There is only one place that has proven to be reliable and trustworthy as it pertains to Sound Doctrine and that is the 66 books of the Holy Bible. The problem with the Bible is that it isn't written in subject order. Scriptures that teach about Salvation are found from cover to cover in the Bible. So it remains our responsibility to pull out of Scripture from both the Old and New Testaments those verses that

prove our stand on each Doctrinal Issue. The pulling out of those Scriptures and the placing of those Scriptures in a systematic and cohesive and organized format is the development of a Doctrinal Statement or a Confession of Faith.

That is precisely why all Doctrine; all holy reproof; all godly correction and all instruction in righteousness must come from the Bible and from the Bible alone. We do not have the right; nor did God give anyone the authority to create Doctrine based upon anything else but Scripture. We all must be very careful that we do not insert our own human reasoning; or our own worldly wisdom; or our own carnal pragmatism to the development of Doctrine. Our human logic has proven to be unreliable when it comes to Doctrinal issues.

So I encourage all who lead in the Church of Jesus Christ to assemble the leaders of your Church and go through the long and tedious process of spelling out precisely what you believe and why you believe it. Take as much time as you need, but go through every single issue and make sure that what you believe and what you teach is 100% backed up by infallible and inerrant, God breathed Scripture.

I can assure you that simply by going through the process, you may find out that you have little or no Scriptural basis for some of your most cherished beliefs. And when you run into that wall- you will have to ask yourself the question, *“If I cannot prove what I believe by Scripture, then why should I hold on to it?”*

Those who are in leadership need to shut down everything that they are doing and hammer out an in depth, serious, Doctrinal Statement or Confession of Faith that explains in detail what you believe about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, Salvation, Baptism, Communion, Marriage, Prayer, Angels, Demons, Heaven, Hell, and every other aspect that you or someone in your Church is going to teach the people that God has given you to shepherd.

Without a Doctrinal Statement, you and your church are a sitting duck for these ungodly men, as Jude calls them, to creep into your Church to destroy it.

Most Doctrinal Statements are either done on the fly or not done at all. This is a tragic mistake. It seems that the goal of many is to be as vague as possible to try not to offend one element or the other in the Church. Again, how can two walk together if they are not in

agreement? To be incomplete or vague about what you believe is to invite error and misunderstanding.

Now you would think developing a Doctrinal Statement would be a snap because, after all, we have a two thousand year history of other people in other ages who did the very same thing that we are trying to do; we have the completed Bible; and we have access to more information than any generation before us. But try it and see. You will find that if you approach this seriously, it will take time. It might take a year or more. But to not do this simply because it is hard or difficult is a cop out.

In the fourth century, the Church was confronted about the issue of the Deity of Christ. This heresy caught the Church with its pants down. There was no formal written Doctrinal Statement about this issue- so the heresy grew until it forced the Church to deal with it.

Was Christ of the very same Essence or Substance with the Father or was Christ a created being that was of a similar but different Essence than God? Which one did the Bible teach?

Beloved it mattered in the fourth century what the Church believed and what the Church taught about this just like it matters today. I beg you today to take the time to examine what you believe and make sure that what you believe and what you teach is the very same thing that God said in His Word and let us all drop our excuses; and let us all accept our responsibility and let us all make sure that our Doctrine is Sound and that it is biblical and that it is what the Apostles taught and let us all rise up in our most holy Faith and let us all 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.