

# 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**

#### 52. The History of Heresy Part 22

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WOSM Thursday 01/17/08

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 last time, we were talking about how that the controversy surrounding the Deity of Christ nearly brought the Church to destruction in the fourth century. Because the Church did not have a written formal Doctrinal Statement concerning the Deity of Jesus Christ, the heretic Arius had been successful in bringing false teaching into the Church and of deceiving all but one bishop.

Now we discussed how that the Roman Emperor, Constantine, had recently converted to Christianity and became very dismayed that his adopted Church was embroiled in a bitter controversy over Doctrine. Constantine, you may recall, had brought peace to the Christian

Church. He had ended 300 years of persecution. The Church now had the opportunity to grow unhindered by outside oppression. The Roman Emperor was utterly amazed that intelligent people were debating about one letter of one word.

The prevailing sentiment in the Church of that day was, *“Who cares whether Jesus was of the same Essence with the Father? Now was the time for the Church to prosper. Who cares whether Christ was Deity or not- what did that have to do with the Church gaining more members and having more influence than at any time in its history?”*

The mood of the Church at this time reflected the mood of society in general. The biggest and most respected names in the Church in the fourth century were all unanimous about this one thing: Sound, Biblical Doctrine didn't matter and to argue about the Deity of Christ at a time when the Church had been set free from outside oppression was ridiculous. Very few- in fact almost no one- saw that inspired Truth was valuable at all. Eusebius, the great Church historian wrote that Faith in Christ was all that mattered- not some arcane point of theology about the incarnation of Christ.

When you read about the struggle in the Church in the fourth century, it reminds you of the condition of the Church today. The modern Church holds to the very same position that the church in the fourth century held about Doctrine. And this is what scares me to death.

You have to understand that the leaders of the Church in the fourth century saw their day as a time when Christianity would experience unprecedented growth and influence- if only they could just get rid of these pesky people who want to make sure that the Doctrine of the Church is Biblical. Little did they know that the greatest battle that the Church had ever faced was just ahead. In fact, the damage that the Arian heresy did to the Church was far greater than the damage that all the persecution over a three hundred year history had done.

You see, most external persecution has the net effect of causing the Church to come together. God's people rally around a crisis. But heresy is insidious because it comes from within the ranks of the Church, and it divides and ruins the love and sweetness and purity of the Church.

So, the majority of those in the Church in the beginning of the fourth century didn't view Alexander's attempt to rebuke Arius' false teaching on the Deity of Christ as either a noble or a necessary thing to preserve the purity of the Gospel. No, the majority of those in the Church at that time viewed Alexander's attempts at excommunicating Arius as an unnecessary and unwelcomed attempt at destroying Christian unity and of diminishing the potential that the Church had to grow and prosper.

So, Alexander, the godly bishop, was looked on as being cruel, harsh, unloving, mean spirited, and unchristian for trying to uphold the Biblical Doctrine of the Deity of Jesus Christ, while Arius, the heretic, was looked on with sympathy- as some type of noble and valiant soul who was being unnecessarily persecuted by a mean and cruel man for simply having a different opinion about something that really didn't matter anyway.

So, when Alexander excommunicated Arius for being an unrepentant heretic who had blasphemed the Deity of Jesus Christ- Alexander was viewed as the bad guy and Arius was viewed as the hero.

Eusebius, the historian, wrote that the Church should allow Alexander to teach whatever he thought about Christ's Deity and the Church should at the same time allow Arius to teach whatever he thought, and the people of the Church should be able to just choose which version of the Divinity of Christ that best suited them.

Now that is a novel idea. Let's just stop teaching Doctrine all together. Let's just let people make their own minds up about every issue of life and godliness. We don't read the Bible too much anymore anyway so why consult that dusty old book when we can just make it up? As long as people are sincere- who cares what they believe? Who cares whether they are saved or not- as long as *they* think that they are in right standing with God- who are we to question them?

Beloved, when the Church loses its bearings; when the House of God leaves off Truth- the whole ball game goes down the drain quick. When the men of God are confused about right and wrong- the people have no hope. When the Church is no longer the light of the world; when the Church is no longer the city set on a hill; when the Church is no longer the pillar and ground of the Truth-society quickly collapses and lives are ruined.

Beloved, if the Church of Jesus Christ doesn't know or doesn't care about the Deity of Christ- who *will* care, Bubba's bait shop?

And if the Bible is not our source of Truth and Doctrine, what will be our source- our dreams? The latest book by the famous evangelist? Oprah? Dr, Phil? Ladies Home Journal? Billy Graham? The pastor? The janitor? Dear Abby? I know, we could call 1-800- tell- me more and ask for Sister Salena? If we are not going to view the Holy Bible as the only reliable source for Objective, propositional, inspired Truth- then it really doesn't matter what else we consult.

The Church leaders of the fourth century tried their hand at compromise. They reasoned within themselves that Arius and Alexander may disagree on this one tiny little point of theology but look at all that they *did* agree on. Surely broad minded and intelligent men of the Church would not allow the Church to be torn apart over one letter of one word. Surely the leaders of the Church in the fourth century could simply brush this petty disagreement under the rug and exalt the many, many areas where these men were in agreement.

So, the real issue in the fourth century was the same as the issue is today: Does any of this really matter? Does it matter what we believe and why we believe it? Does it matter from where we get our Doctrine? Does it have any effect on our salvation and our walk with God and our relationship with Jesus Christ if we are carried away with false teaching and error? Does it matter that the leaders of the Church disagree fundamentally on what the Bible teaches about issues like Salvation, and the Deity of Jesus Christ?

Are Biblical Doctrines about the Virgin birth; the sinless life of Jesus; the Deity of Christ and Justification simply window dressing and food for academics or do they give us insight and knowledge about the One who saves us?

If you think that Doctrinal purity is all just an exercise among intellectuals and totally irrelevant to the saving of lost souls, then congratulations, you hold the very same view that the majority in the Church in the fourth century held. And that view nearly caused the Church to be destroyed. But if you think that this stuff really matters and that we have to get the Gospel right and we have to know right from wrong and we must understand and value and teach everything that God said was important- then you will be labeled as a troublemaker and will be as unwelcomed as Alexander and Athanasius

was in the fourth century. But you just may rescue the Church from serious error.

My Christian brothers and sisters, those who go the popular route; those who develop Doctrine by consensus; those who do not value the things that God values may be well thought of; they may be very popular; but we must know that they are in rebellion to the Word of God and need to repent. And that is what we need to say.

My friends, this is why all of this mattered. If Arius was right, and Jesus was not God, but was a lesser created being, then those who worshipped Christ as God were guilty of idolatry. But if Alexander was right, then those who would *not* worship Christ were guilty of withholding worship from God. So even though this issue stemmed from one letter of one word- the iota- the implications of this issue were enormous. So, the Church couldn't let this issue ride- they had to settle it once and for all.

Unfortunately, almost no one in the Church saw this issue that clearly. Every Bishop and every church leader had been given a charge to protect and preserve Church unity- not to facilitate Church purity. Doctrinal disputes, therefore, were seen by these men as the enemy of Church unity which had to be quashed at all cost- even at the cost of changing or ignoring Biblical Truth.

So, the goal of the leaders of the Church at that time was not to hammer out a Sound Biblical response to the challenge of Arianism; no, their goal was to simply push Truth over so that the church could embrace and accommodate the error.

After Arius had been excommunicated from the Church and exiled from Alexandria- Arius began a letter writing campaign to friends and enemies far and wide. A couple of those letters were preserved by the historians. We still have one letter that Arius wrote to Eusebius, the Arian and another one that he wrote to Bishop Alexander.

These letters show us that Arius was indeed a two faced and evil man who was very skilled at disguising his true intentions. To Eusebius, Arius wrote and insisted that Alexander was wrong, and Arius wrote over and over again that Christ *had* to be a created being- which meant that Jesus could not be Deity. In his letter to Eusebius, Arius wrote that his view alone was the real truth and that to teach that Christ was Deity was heresy. Arius insists over and over that his

view is the true doctrine and every other view- especially that which Alexander taught was false.

But when you read the letter that Arius wrote to Alexander, Arius shows that he was not honest, because he told Alexander that he was perfectly willing to gloss over the differences with Alexander and that it really didn't matter if Christ was Deity or not.

Arius had started the Controversy by calling Alexander a heretic for teaching that Christ was Deity, but when it came time for the Church to carefully examine what Arius taught- Arius aligned himself with those who said that Doctrinal purity didn't matter.

So, Arius was perfectly willing to say that we shouldn't teach Christ's Deity when he thought that others would agree with him, but when it came time for his teachings to be carefully analyzed, he changed his tune and said that we all just need to get along.

Arius was a very popular and charismatic person who was well liked in the Church. Constantine wanted Arius and Alexander to resolve this issue between them, but the controversy only grew more and more serious. The Bishops around the world were reluctant to take a stand for either side- so the stage was now set for the Arian Controversy to finally come to a head.

The majority of Bishops said that Arius' excommunication was too harsh a penalty and pleaded with Alexander for tolerance. They said that the Church was big enough to hold both views. So, the hue and cry of the early fourth century was not a cry for Truth and Doctrinal purity, but a cry for tolerance and this warped sense of tolerance became more valuable and more exalted a virtue than Truth.

Finally, the Emperor Constantine had had enough of the division and called for an Ecumenical Council to convene in the city of Nicea, a city in what is modern day Turkey, and to examine this issue and to reach a resolution. So, the stage is now set for the Council of Nicea to examine the error of Arius and to make a determination about the Deity of Jesus Christ. This was done because the Bible commands us to 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.