

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**

50. The History of Heresy Part 20

WOSM Tuesday 01/15/08

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 the Arians was all about.

And last time we saw how that the battle over the Arian Controversy had been set. On the one hand, Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria was teaching that Jesus Christ was of the very same Substance and Essence of God the Father. He said that Christ and the Father were homoousia- the same substance.

On the other hand, Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria had added one letter to the word that Alexander was using and said that God the Son was *homoiousia*- similar- but different- than God the Father. The effect of Arius adding one letter to one word was that Christ's full, biblical Deity was denied. Arius' heresy taught in effect that Jesus was

more than a man, but was less than God- which of course, an unbiblical position.

As we discussed last time, the Emperor of Rome, Constantine had recently converted to Christianity and had issued the Edict of Milan which in effect gave Christianity full legal status in the Empire. With that move, Christianity went in one day from being an illegal and persecuted religion to the de-facto religion of Rome.

So you have met three of the six men who were center stage in this real life drama of Church history. You have met Arius- the wicked presbyter of Alexandria, who started the heresy and who gave Arianism its name. You have met Alexander, the godly Bishop of Alexandria who opposed Arius and who held to the Biblical teaching that Christ was fully Divine. And you have also met Constantine, the Roman Emperor, who had converted to Christianity and who was now wanting to get involved in the Church.

Now I want to introduce you to three more people who will help you to comprehend the importance of this struggle in the fourth century. I want you to meet Eusebius of Caesarea- the famous Church historian. Eusebius was a personal friend of Arius. And while it isn't fair to classify him as a full blown Arian- he was at least sympathetic to Arius' teaching. Then there is the fifth player who was also named Eusebius- He was Eusebius of Nicomedia. This Eusebius was in league with Arius all the way. This Eusebius was one of the leaders of the Arian Controversy who operated in the Church behind the scenes. To help keep these guys straight, I will call them Eusebius the historian and Eusebius the Arian.

Now we come to the real hero of the story- a man by the name of Athanasius. It was Athanasius who became the human instrument by which God used to salvage the Christian Church and rescue it from the heresy of Arianism.

There was a moment in this crisis when Athanasius was literally the only bishop in the Christian Church who had not compromised with or fully embraced the heresy of Arianism. Athanasius stood alone against every other leader in the Christian Church and forcefully and passionately defended the Biblical account of the Deity of Christ against his own brethren and did not hesitate to call them all to repentance. Athanasius never wavered; he never faltered; he never went back on what the Bible plainly and boldly declared about Jesus in **John 1:1**:

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

I tell you that this time is really one of the most significant events in the 2,000 year old history of the Church. And Athanasius did us all proud as he refused to compromise with error even about one letter of a single word. In fact, there is a Latin phrase that describes this moment that reads, *Athanasius Contra Mundo*, which means, “*Athanasius against the entire world*”. And like I said- this would make a fantastic movie.

So, let’s review the Chronology. Arius is ordained as a presbyter in 311; Constantine is converted in 312. In 319, Arius accuses his own bishop, Alexander of teaching Modalism because Alexander declares that God the Father and God the Son are of the very same Essence or the very same Substance.

Arius goes on a tirade and teaches that God the Father and God the Son are of a *similar* but entirely different Essence or Substance- in effect denying the Deity of Christ.

In 321, after trying for years to bring Arius back into the Truth, Alexander convenes a Council and excommunicates Arius from the Church for teaching a heresy that denies the Deity of Christ.

About this same time, Constantine was beginning to settle in and enjoy the peace of a united Empire. He had won all of his wars; he had embraced Christianity and he wanted to bring peace and prosperity back to the Roman Empire.

Constantine was shocked that the Bishops and presbyters of the Church that he had embraced were fighting over Doctrine. The dispute between Arius and Alexander was raging and was the topic of conversation in the entire eastern half of the Roman Empire. From Egypt to Palestine, the discussion in the market place centered on the struggle over the Deity of Christ. It was that big of a debate.

So Constantine became very troubled about this dispute and he did something that was totally unprecedented. The secular Roman Emperor intervened in a theological dispute in the Church.

Constantine wrote a joint letter to both Arius and Alexander which said this in part:

“Give me back my quiet days and carefree nights. Do not let me spend the

rest of my days joylessly.”

And here was Constantine’s proposed solution. He said,

“Set aside your differences. Drop this argument over Doctrine.”

In essence, Constantine was telling these men that he believed that the external unity of the Church in the community was more important than Sound Doctrine. That it was more important that the Church *appear* to be in unity than it was that the Church was faithful to Scripture. Constantine was saying that to him it was more important that Arius and Alexander liked each other and put forth a show of unity than it was that they taught what was True. Boy that sounds familiar, doesn’t it? This is exactly the prevailing sentiment in the Church today. Many today feel as though no point of Doctrine- no matter how critical or crucial it is, is worth fighting over. That somehow if we all just try to get along- it really doesn’t matter what we believe. This is exactly what Constantine was saying.

Constantine was baffled by the division. He had just ended 300 years of persecution against the Church. Christianity had a chance now to flourish and prosper and here these men were arguing over one letter of one word.

Eusebius the historian, who was also the Bishop of Caesarea wrote this,

“Who knows how the soul is united with the body and how it leaves it, and yet we venture to inquire into the eternal Essence of the Godhead? Christ said, ‘he that believeth on me hath everlasting life’- not he who understands how Christ is begotten of the Father. Were the latter the case, no man could attain unto Salvation.”

So we can see that the mood in the fourth century Church was very similar to the mood in the Church today. Doctrine divides; doctrine splits people apart; so let’s minimize Doctrine or eliminate it altogether- because as long as you believe on Jesus- nothing else matters, right?

Many say today that to even attempt to believe or God forbid, proclaim Sound Doctrine is not even Christian because Objective,

propositional Truth makes so many people feel bad- and if it makes people feel bad- it can't be of God. So not only is Sound Doctrine the problem to these modern day Constantines, but those who teach Biblical Truth and who believe the Bible are actually hindering the last day move of God's Spirit in the earth. Huh?

So are we to believe that the only way that God can move is if we don't know or understand right from wrong? That the only way to have God move in our lives is to be confused about things like How a Man is Saved; and the Deity of Christ? And are we to assume that anytime anyone says that false Doctrine is actually "false" – that he is the problem- and not the false Doctrine.

The other night on the news, I heard a man say that the real problem with illegal immigrants is saying that illegal immigrants are "illegal". Well what are we supposed to call them- "legal"?

Beloved please hear me. False Doctrine has always been false and it will always will be false. False Doctrine will never ever become Truth- no matter how you package it or how you market it. A lie is a lie no matter what you call it or how you sell it. Listen, we can all hold hands; we can all sway back and forth; and we can all talk about unity and we can rejoice that the walls of division are falling down and we can sing Kum-Bah-Ya till the cows come home, but a false understanding of the Deity of Christ will never become a true understanding of the Deity of Christ.

So our real discussion is whether any of this matters. Many today say that it doesn't matter. They say that it is more important to just believe in Jesus than it is to get into deep theological issues that nobody really cares about anyway. Well, that is exactly what the heretics and false teachers and false prophets of the world are hoping you will say.

And it is precisely because we put so little value today on Bible Truth and Church History that millions of people right now are reading the Da Vinci Code. Because we have told people today that Sound Doctrine is dull and dry and boring- millions of people are following the false teachings of Joseph Smith, Ellen G, White, Charles Taze Russell, and Kenneth Copeland. Because we have stressed to people for years now that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere that we have a 50 % divorce rate in the Church and a record number of people who think that they are saved and yet who continue to shack up and who continue to have illegitimate children. Because the modern

Church has adopted the stance of Constantine about how that Doctrine is not as important as just getting along- we have millions of people today who are working and struggling so hard to try to earn their own salvation, and who are trying to build up their own righteousness and who are trying to deserve Salvation through their own good works.

Beloved how many more people have to suffer until we repent and return to the clear and authoritative teachings of the Bible? How many more people have to be deceived and led down paths of destruction by ravening wolves dressed in sheep's clothing before we turn around and come home to Scriptural Truth? How many more sheep have to be taken advantage of before we are willing to say that it matters what we believe and it matters how we live and it matters what people are teaching? How many more inventions of man do we have to create before we are willing to accept the authority of Scripture alone in our lives? And how much moral collapse are we willing to endure before the Church of Jesus Christ repents and returns to her first Love?

Beloved, without Doctrine we don't know what to believe; we don't know where to stand; we don't know how to walk; we don't know how to fight; we don't know what pleases God and what does not please God. Without Sound Doctrine- we wander from one gimmick to the next; from one clever man to the next; from one spiritual fad to the next; from one hobby horse to the next; from one scheme to the next.

The Emperor of Rome in the fourth century didn't think that it mattered whether Christ was Deity or not. One of the greatest Church historians didn't think that Doctrine was important. The majority of the leaders of the Church were willing to lay down their arms in order to have peace. But God raised up one man who said that what God said was true and what God said mattered. And God used this one man to save the Church from total collapse.

Athanasius didn't listen to the historians. He didn't follow the overwhelming majority of the Church leaders and he completely ignored the Emperor of Rome. We need to thank God that Athanasius's ear was tuned to the Voice of God as recorded in the Bible and this one man earnestly contended for the Faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints, and through him, the very gates of hell did not prevail against the Church. 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.