

## Defending the Truth – 100-300 AD

### *Christian History Part 2*

Coast School of Theology; Pastor Earl Miles; September 1, 2019

*Christian History Made Easy by Timothy Paul Jones*

**Chronological snobbery** is the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited. You must find why it went out of date. Was it ever refuted (and if so by whom, where, and how conclusively), or did it merely die away as fashions do? If the latter, this tells us nothing about its truth or falsehood. – C.S. Lewis

- Attacks from the outside (session 1): persecutions (John 15:18-20; 16:1-4)
- Attacks from the inside (session 2): false teaching (Acts 20:28-30; Galatians 1:1-12)

Review: The First Christians – 1-100 AD

*Why is Christian history important?*

- History matters because the **gospel** matters.
- History matters because **God's Word** matters.
- History matters because **God's work** matters.

*What happened after Acts 28?*

- Persecution under Nero after the **fire in Rome** (64 AD)
- Division after the **fall of Jerusalem** (70 AD)
- Deification of Emperors** in their lifetimes (81-96 AD)
- Deepening Persecution** of Christians

DVD

The Concern: That what was taught in the Church was what was taught by the Apostles who were eyewitnesses of the risen Christ and were authorized to speak on behalf of Christ. (slide 4)

### 1. Orthodoxy and Heresy

- a. The DaVinci Code by Dan Brown (slide 5)
  - Several 'christianities' in the 1<sup>st</sup> century
  - Sacred sexual rituals

- Political reasons for saying Jesus was divine
- Mary Magdalene was married to Jesus
- Raised questions:
  - Competing versions of Christianity?
  - What books should be seen as representing true Christianity?

b. Walter Bauer's hypothesis

- *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*
- *Orthodoxy is simply the version of Christianity that won! – Bauer's opinion*

Orthodoxy = 'ortho' = straight (straight or right opinion)

Heresy = 'haireisis' = choose different

Jude 1:3

1 Corinthians 11:2

2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6

## 2. Four False Perspectives on Jesus

Which version of early Christianity? (slide 5)

**a. Ebionites** ("poor ones") = Jesus is Man, but not God

Messiah spirit put on a mere man at his baptism.

**b. Docetists** ("I seem") = Jesus is God, but not Man

1 John 2:22-24

1 John 4:1-3

**c. Gnostics** ("in the know") = Two Gods

Supreme God who created lesser gods, one of which is the 'Evil God' of the Jewish OT.

Jesus came to set us free from the Evil God and the evil world he created.

Secret knowledge necessary for salvation.

Anti-Jewish

Fit well with Plato and other Greek Philosophers (physical and spiritual world separate; physical world is evil)

Rituals similar to pagan religions

**d. Marcionism** = Edits the Bible

Marcion was the son of a church elder and a ship builder who edited the Bible so that the OT 'Evil God' would be cut out; he ended up with a Bible of 11 books (Luke + 10 of Paul's letters; all edited) established churches and died in 160 AD.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

**3. Three Ways that Christians Responded**

How do we know what the truth is about Jesus, who He is, what He did, and what He taught?

**a. Canon of Scripture**

'canon' = measuring stick

Boundary or limit of belief or books read in the church worship

i. Can the text be traced to an eyewitness or a close associate of an eyewitness?

Early consensus: the authoritative writings must be able to be traced back to the apostles (themselves or their associates)

20 of the 27 NT books were accepted early and never questioned

Took forgeries seriously

Recognized books that were edifying to read but not to be read in worship

Muratorian Fragment: Shepherd of Hermas

John 14:26; 15:20, 26-27; 16:12-15; 17:18-21

John 20:21-23

2 Peter 1:16-21; 3:1-2, 15-16

1 John 4:5-6

What if they weren't sure about a book's connection to an apostle? (like the other 7 books of the NT)

They asked two other questions:

- i. Do other congregations accept this text as a testimony that can be traced to an eyewitness or a close associate of an eyewitness?
- ii. Does this text agree with other texts that can be traced without any doubt to an eyewitness or a close associate of an eyewitness?

(20 books already accepted as authoritative)

Believed that the Scripture shouldn't contradict itself (the Gospel of Peter)

A consensus developed over the 27 books of the NT over 3-400 years

How did we get our present NT?

- Churches kept the originals
- About 200 AD, churches began to make copies of the originals and they shared them with each other
- Today, we have more than 5,600 fragments or whole copies of the NT
- Sometimes copyists made mistakes, but today scholars can compare the many copies we have and determine with great confidence what the original text said

***b. Confession of Faith***

- i. A series of questions asked at baptism that later developed into the Apostles' Creed.

***c. Centralized Authority***

- i. Overseers (bishops) oversaw multiple congregations and traced their teachings back to the apostles.
  - Originally, a team of local elders lead each church
  - In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, one overseer or bishop took prominence over several churches or regions
  - They sought to trace their authority back to the apostles in order to prevent the ordination of pastors through other groups like the Gnostics or Montanists
  - Eventually, the Bishop of Rome gained greater and greater authority
  - All this happened during a time of persecution (in 203, one of the Roman emperors made it illegal to convert to Judaism or Christianity) and Christians, as criminals, were fed to the wild beasts in the amphitheaters, in place of the gladiators (Perpetua and Felicity)

**Application: Theological Triage**

*Article: A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity by Al Mohler*

Three Categories to Put Doctrines In

- Essential Doctrines: those necessary to be a Christian
  - ❖ The Deity of Jesus
  - ❖ Justification by Faith Alone
  - ❖ Trinity
  - ❖ Resurrection of Jesus
  
- Dividing Doctrines: those that usually must be agreed upon to be in the same church (especially among the leadership)
  - ❖ Infant Baptism
  - ❖ Ordination of Women
  - ❖ Sign Gifts in the Church
  - ❖ T.U.L.I.P
  
- Debatable Doctrines: those that members of the same church can disagree on
  - ❖ Age of the Earth
  - ❖ Eschatology (End Times)
  - ❖ Music Styles
  - ❖ Marriage and Divorce