

Heresies in the Early Church (to 325)

Does what we believe really matter to God? Isn't love more important than Doctrine?

1. Note the importance of doctrinal unity in the BIBLE!!

Old Testament:

- DEUTERONOMY 6: Shema (Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is one..."
- DEUTERONOMY 13:1ff "If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, ²and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," ³you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. ⁴It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. ⁵That prophet or dreamer must be put to death for inciting rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. That prophet or dreamer tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.

NEW TESTAMENT: Apostles insisted that some things must be believed!!!

- **Nature of Christ:**
1 John 2 ²² Who is the liar? It is whoever **denies that Jesus is the Christ.** Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

1 John 4v ² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges **that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,** ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

- **Salvation by faith alone without works**

Galatians 1 v 6-9 ⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! ⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

- **Penal Substitutionary Atonement and the resurrection – Jesus and ours!!**

1 Cor 15v1ff 15 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word, I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas,^[b] and then to the Twelve....

.....¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of

the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

The early church therefore:

- a. **Cherished the idea of orthodoxy**
- b. **Worked hard to keep the church free from error**

2. WHAT WERE THE CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES INFLUENCING CHRISTIANS IN THE EARLY CHURCH??

3. When the early Church was trying to define what it believed it was being pulled in three directions i. Hebrew, ii. Greek iii. Philo of Alexandria (a Hebrew influenced by Greek philosophy)

A. Hebrew (God is One!!!) THE SHEMA!!! To many early, Jewish Disciples the concept of a Trinity sounded like they were supposed to believe in **THREE GODS – FATHER < SON < SPIRIT!!**

- i. **Ebionites** – Jesus was a very Holy man – **NOT BORN OF A VIRGIN** - a man who was adopted (This is an example of another heresy called "ADOPTIONISM") by God at his baptism and filled with the Holy Spirit, making Jesus a vehicle for God's will. He died

on the cross as a perfect sacrifice. HOWEVER, you had to become a Jew to get the benefit of Jesus death.

- ii. **Modalism or Sebellianism or Praxianism (No Trinity** - God was changing hats very quickly at the Baptism!!)

B. **Greek Philosophy (Plato) – (Eminations)**

- God had created or begotten lesser forms of himself who took it upon themselves to create a PHYSICAL UNIVERSE!!! TERRIBLE!!!

Gnosticism: Gnostics were people within the church who attempted to interpret Christianity through the lens of Greek Cosmology:

Gnosticism is an umbrella term for a diverse movement of more than 50 ancient spiritual sects that sprang up around the same time as early Christianity (though some sects predated Christianity). Gnosticism peaked in the first and second century, but continued to influence Western thought for centuries—and still survives in some spiritual belief systems today. The term comes from the Greek word gnosis, meaning “knowledge.”

They believed that...

- The Physical realm, the body (SEX) looked upon as impure and to be avoided as much as possible (Catholic Church attitude towards women who produced New Humans - CELIBACY!!!)
- The True God communicated with men through secret knowledge to enlighten them and help them escape (**Film The MATRIX RED PILLED!!**)

- It was usually the Rich and Clever people were attracted by this philosophy, less intelligent people had to put up with the Bible and preaching!! (Tom Cruise and Scientology)
- They had their own Scriptures: Nag Hamadi (Egypt) Scriptures found - in 1945 – Gospel of Thomas, Acts of John, Secret Gospel of Mark.
- Late dates of authorship – not written by Peter, John etc..
- Weird literary style!!
- Remember the DA VINCI CODE? – JESUS MARRIED MARY MAGDALENE: **GOSPEL OF THOMAS** “Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of Life.” Jesus said, “I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” (section 114).
- **GOSPEL OF PHILLIP**
The (Lord loved) Mariam more than (all the (other) Disciples, (and he) kissed her often on her (mouth). The other (women) saw his love for Mariam,
- they say to him: Why do thou love (her) more than all of us?
- The Savior replied, he says to them: Why do I not love you as (I do) her? [(While) a blind (person) and one who sees are both in the dark, they do not differ from one another. When the light comes, then he who sees shall behold the light, and he who is blinded shall remain in the darkness.]

Varieties of Gnosticism

- **Docetism** – Jesus merely seemed to be human. God could not take a human body and do things as base as go to the loo, bleed, etc...
- If he has no human body he can't be a second Adam, die on the Cross or suffer for sin.
- **Apostle John appears to be dealing with both Ebionites and Docetics in his writings – explaining who Jesus was**
 - a. **DEITY:**

John 1v1ff1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

b. HUMANITY

John 1v14 “and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”!!!

1 John 1v1-3. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it,

Marcionism (135AD)

- Marcionism was an Early Christian dualist belief system that originated in the teachings of Marcion of Sinope who settled in Rome around the year 144. Marcion was the son of a bishop!! Bishop of Sinope in Pontus. About the middle of the second century he traveled to Rome, where he joined a Syrian Gnostic group.
- – He believed in Gnostic Dualism:
- Bad God of OT was a different deity to the Good God of NT (loved Paul’s writings and recognised ONLY Luke’s Gospel.
- A Gospel such as Matthew which claimed that Jesus was fulfilling Prophecy given by that O.T GOD could not be correct.
- (encouraged Christians to define the extent of the Canon of scripture – particularly the Old Testament.

To deal with both of these tendencies the Church developed a double strategy:

1. **Statements of belief called Creeds: developed to define acceptable Doctrine**

APOSTLES CREED (EBIONITES AND GNOSTICS/MODALISTS/DOCETICS)

I believe in God the Father almighty;
and in Christ Jesus His only Son, our Lord,

Who was born from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
Who under Pontius Pilate was **crucified** and buried,
on the third day rose again from the dead,
ascended into heaven,
sits at the right hand of the Father,
whence he will come to judge the living and the dead;
and in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Church,
the remission of sins,
the resurrection of the flesh,
[life everlasting].

c. **APOLOGISTS/HERESY HUNTERS**

These men

- a. Defended the faith against Heretics
- b. Sought to deal with objections and opposition from the Pagan world and sought to defend and explain Christianity as something reasonable to these Pagans.

Apostolic Fathers

2st Century

Justin Martyr (Born in Judea appx. 100AD) – Died 165AD Dialogue with Trypho the Jew

Irenaeus of Lyon – Died 202AD Against Heresies (Gnosticism) 180AD

AND....

ANTI-NICENE FATHERS (Fathers before the Council of Nicea in 325AD)

3nd Century

Tertullian of Carthage – Died 240AD

A. Father of Latin Theology (prior to this they were all Greeks/Greek speaking)

- B. Blood of the Martyrs is seed of the Church
- C. If the Tiber Floods... Christians to the Lions.
- D. Invented the Phrase "TRINITY": TRI UNITY

He wrote AGAINST THE GNOSTICS and AGAINST PRAXIUS

Clement of Alexandria – Died 215AD Plato was Gods Apostle to the Pagan World, Jesus to the Jews – Jesus is God's final and complete revelation of himself.

Origen of Alexandria – Died 254AD :wrote Contra Celcus (Pagan Philosopher)

Also the first systematic Theology of the Christian Church

- Tortured for 3 solid years – He was so influential the Romans wanted him to renounce Christianity!!!

D. **Third category of influence:**

Hebrews influenced by Greeks (Philo of Alexandria – lived from 25BC to 44AD.

Philo was a Jewish Philosopher who was influenced by the Philosophy of Plato. His School of theological Philosophy influenced Clement of Alexandria and Origen!!! He lived in Alexandria which was the Intellectual/Cultural Capital of the Roman Empire (Athens was in decline)

- PLATO BELIEVED IN EMINATIONS. One of these emanations was "WISDOM" OR "REASON" AND THROUGH IT GOD MADE THE WORLD

PHILO SAW A PARALLEL BETWEEN THIS AND GOD SPEAKING ABOUT REASON IN PROVERBS 8

22. "The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works,^[14]
before his deeds of old;

²³ I was formed long ages ago,

at the very beginning, when the world came to be.
²⁴ When there were no watery depths, I was given birth,
 when there were no springs overflowing with water;
²⁵ before the mountains were settled in place,
 before the hills, I was given birth,
²⁶ before he made the world or its fields
 or any of the dust of the earth.
²⁷ I was there when he set the heavens in place,
 when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,
²⁸ when he established the clouds above
 and fixed securely the fountains of the deep,
²⁹ when he gave the sea its boundary
 so the waters would not overstep his command,
 and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.
³⁰ Then I was constantly[Ⓜ] at his side.
 I was filled with delight day after day,
 rejoicing always in his presence,
³¹ rejoicing in his whole world
 and delighting in mankind.
³² "Now then, my children, listen to me;
 blessed are those who keep my ways.
³³ Listen to my instruction and be wise;
 do not disregard it.

- Philo combined the Old Testament's idea of God's WISDOM or "Word" with the Platonic concept of "Reason" – both translated "Logos" in Greek.
- Two church Fathers -**Clement of Alexandria and his Disciple Origen of Alexandria** continued to experiment with this kind of synthesis.
- JESUS WAS WISDOM in Proverbs 8!!!!!!
- The Father generated the Son just as Plato said God generated "Wisdom"
- **PEOPLE BEGAN TO ASK>>>>>**
 - i. **If the son was generated in some way by the Father Jesus must be less than the Father???**
 - ii. **Isn't he a created being like the rest of creation???**

- iii. IF the Son owes his existence to the Father THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A TIME WHEN JESUS DID NOT EXIST??? JESUS IS NOT ETERNAL? IF YOU ARE NOT ETERNAL THEN YOU CAN'T BE DIVINE???

ENTER A GENTLEMAN CALLED ARIUS!!!

Arianism (early decades of the 4th Century (300s AD)

- Arius looked at this and quite logically came to the conclusion that the Son was :
 - a. Created and therefore LESS than the Father
 - b. There was a time when the son did not exist.(Campaign against trinitarianism – invented campaign songs and Street Quires!!!

ATHENASIUS argued:

Although he was begotten he was ETERNALLY BEGOTTEN

1. Jesus must be the same as God because
 - a. The Son is to be worshipped (Hebrews ch 1)
 - b. The son saves us – yet only God SAVES.
2. COUNCIL OF NICEA 325AD
 - Called by Emperor Constantine
 - Appx 320 Bishops from all over the Roman Empire
 - Arius regarded as a Heretic – Exiled
 - Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of all things visible and invisible;
And in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the Son of God,
begotten from the Father, only-begotten,
that is, from the substance of the Father,
God from God,
light from light,
true God from true God,
begotten not made,
of one substance with the Father,
through Whom all things came into being,

things in heaven and things on earth,
Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down,
and became incarnate
and became man,
and suffered,
and rose again on the third day,
and ascended to the heavens,
and will come to judge the living and dead,

And in the Holy Spirit.

But as for those who say, There was when He was not,
and, Before being born He was not,
and that He came into existence out of nothing,
or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance,
or created,
or is subject to alteration or change
- these the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.

Finally, Heresies involving the Holy Spirit

1. Montanism

The Montanist writings have perished, except for brief references preserved by ecclesiastical writers. The chief sources for the history of the movement are Eusebius' ([*Ecclesiastical History*](#)), and the writings of Tertullian.

- According to the known history, Montanus, a recent Christian convert, WHO HAD A CAREER AS A PAGAN PROPHET OR ORACLE (LIKE THE ORACLE AT DELPHI)
- Professed conversion to Christianity
- appeared in Phrygia, about 156. He fell into a trance and began to “prophesy under the influence of the Spirit.”
- He was soon joined by two young women, Prisca, or Priscilla, and Maximilla, who also began to prophesy. The movement spread throughout Asia Minor. Inscriptions have indicated that a number of towns were almost completely converted to Montanism. After the first enthusiasm had waned, however, the followers of Montanus were found predominantly in the rural districts.

The essential principles of Montanism were:

1. That the Paraclete or the Spirit of truth, whom Jesus had promised in the Gospel According to John, was manifesting himself to the world through Montanus and the prophets and prophetesses associated with him – HE HAD THE FINAL REVELATION FROM GOD!!
2. The End of the world was very near and the Kingdom of God and the New Jerusalem would soon descend to earth in Phrygia in TURKEY – in Montanus lifetime!!
3. It became clear that the claim of Montanus to have the final revelation of the Holy Spirit implied that something could be added to the teaching of Christ and the Apostles and that, therefore, the church had to accept a fuller revelation.
4. In addition to prophetic enthusiasm, Montanism taught a legalistic moral rigorism. The time of fasting was lengthened, followers were forbidden to flee from martyrdom, marriage was discouraged, and second marriages were prohibited.

When it became obvious that the Montanist doctrine was an attack on the Catholic faith, the bishops of Asia Minor gathered in synods and finally excommunicated the Montanists, probably c. 177.

IMPACT OF HERESY IN THE CHURCH??

1. It spurred on the quest to identify what was true scripture and what was false – establishment of the Canon of Scripture!!
2. It encouraged Debate (church councils) to sort out and define “ORTHADOXY” which gave us our CREEDS!!
3. Accidentally led to Authoritarianism and the rise of the BISHOP!! – As people argued over the interpretation of scripture and even the creeds, a short cut was to say

- “Listen, I am the Bishop – and what I say goes”
- “My authority comes from the fact that the Apostles or their successors laid their hands on me – so I have their authority (Apostolic Succession)
- This was the starting point of a religious tendency that would develop into the Roman Catholic Church!!