

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**

48. The History of Heresy Part 18

WOSM Friday 01/11/08

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 group rose up in the fourth century who attacked the Deity of Christ head on. This was the most serious attack against the Person of Christ that the Church had seen and it nearly overwhelmed the Church- due in part to the Church's unwillingness to fight against it.

The Arians taught that Jesus was more than a man but was less than God, which in effect made Jesus to be a created being. And as you follow the teachings of Arianism out to its inevitable conclusion, you will see why they teach that Jesus was not Deity but was angelic and was in fact, Michael the arch- angel in the Old Testament.

It is shocking to know that of all the ancient heresies we have seen so far- this one was the worst, and this is the one that nearly

took over the Church. Yet this is the heresy that the Church didn't resist until it was almost too late.

The heresy of Arianism was bold and blatant and was not hidden at all once it was allowed to enter into the Church. The Deity of Christ was attacked with a ferocity like no other Christian Doctrine had ever been fought. When presented with clear Scriptural proof of Christ's Divinity, the Arians were unashamed in their answer. They said, *"If the Bible teaches that Christ was Divine, then by all means let us change the Bible"*.

It was in large part, the boldness of the Arians that won over most of the Church leaders. These people had no shame; no fear; and no remorse. They were willing to rewrite the entire Bible if necessary to fit their Doctrine- and they made no bones about it. Their stated goal was to cause the Church to place the stamp of orthodoxy on their heresy that Christ was fully human, but was not Deity. This boldness in and of itself was the reason that many fell into this heresy. They reasoned that if these people were wrong, then God would have either convicted them or judged them. The Church leaders had forgotten that the Bible clearly teaches that some people can go too far with God. Some people can presume upon the Grace of God until God turns them over to a reprobate mind. Paul wrote about these kind of people in **Romans 1:20-32:**

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,
27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.
28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,
29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips,
30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,
31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;
32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

So, we must not be taken back by the boldness of heretics and atheists today. These people are able to get to the place where God no longer deals with them and their mission in life is not to seek after and understand Divine Truth- it is simply to tear up the Church of God.

Now part of the problem early in the fourth century Church was the fact that the persecution of the Church that had begun on day one was now letting up. For the first three centuries after the first prayer meeting in the Upper Room, when the Church was born- Christianity was a *minority* religion. The Christian Church had endured three hundred years of living under the constant treat of annihilation.

If you remember from your high school history that in the year A.D. 312, the emperor of Rome, Constantine, suddenly made a public profession of faith in Christ. Now I have no idea whether Constantine actually got saved or not, but history shows that he did make a public profession and that his sudden conversion was big news. In the following year, A.D. 313, Constantine issued the “Edict of Milan”, which for the first time ever, granted toleration for Christianity within the Roman Empire. This Edict even gave the Christian Church some special tax breaks. The effect was that the people of the Roman Empire now had a financial incentive to follow their emperor

and convert to Christianity. This is how Christianity became almost overnight, the de-facto religion of Rome.

Constantine was supposedly converted because of a vision that he had supposedly seen. During the battle of the Molivian Bridge, Constantine said that he looked up in the sky and saw the Christian monogram. The Christian monogram is used in many Eastern Churches today, you may have seen it, it is a cross that looks like an “X”, superimposed on a “P”.

Constantine said that he saw this symbol in the sky and under the symbol was the words, “By this sign, conquer”. So he converted to Christianity and from that time on, the Church was no longer persecuted like it had been.

Now it is good when people are not persecuted. I am certainly not in favor of persecution against the Church. But because I do know that we are carnal creatures and that if given an abundance of Peace and Safety and Prosperity- most people- most Christians- most good Christians will get fat, dumb, and happy. It is simply human nature to get relaxed when all is well.

This is the biggest problem with the American Church today. We have too much money and too much spare time and we feel far too safe and far too peaceful and we have a sense of security and warmth that tends to make us apathetic, relaxed, and more in tune with keeping our prosperity and our materialism intact than we are to earnestly seek after the things of God. Now I know that I am not going to get on a lot of people’s Christmas party list for saying this, but it is the truth- so I am bound to say it. Here we go.

The unprecedented Peace and Prosperity that we have enjoyed in this country over the last 60 years is not of God. It is a trap of the devil to divert our minds and our hearts away from the things that matter most to things that moth will corrupt and that rust will take away.

The overwhelming majority of all the teachings that I have personally heard from the modern snake oil salesmen on the Hay, Wood, and Stubble television network about prosperity are not Biblical, and are not true and are false teachings that promote greed and idolatry and covetousness and discontent in the hearts and minds of God’s people.

And this turn from Biblical Christianity to materialistic idolatry is destroying the Church and the people in the Church. At the very same time that we have enjoyed this unprecedented Peace and Prosperity in this Country- we have also seen a total and complete collapse of Biblical morality and the two things are connected.

The same thing that is happening to us today happened to the Church in the fourth century. The great persecution of the Church had stopped. Women were no longer being made widows because of the Gospel. Little children had their fathers at home every night because their fathers were no longer being thrown into jail for serving Christ.

And at first, the Church rejoiced at this newfound Peace. But soon, human nature took over. Soon prayer meetings went unattended- because the people no longer saw the need to pray. Before they were earnestly praying that they could live long enough to declare the Gospel to just one more soul- but now because they were living in peace- they saw no need to pray at all.

And because of the tax breaks, Christians began to actually prosper more than non- Christians. So with this prosperity came more stuff and with more stuff came the need to tend to more stuff and less time to study the Bible; less time to pray; less time to witness; less time to serve God. In the fourth century Church, some even preached that fasting had been done away with because the need to draw close to God had passed. Some even went so far as to declare that since Constantine was so good to the Church- this must be the second coming of Christ.

The result was you couldn't pay people to do what they had done before the Peace and the Prosperity had come. They simply were too busy; too occupied and too involved in making this world their home and these things their heavenly rewards.

The heretics took this opportunity to rush into the Church to destroy it. And they nearly succeeded. The people of God were so busy becoming important that they forgot about defending the Faith. But please don't look down on them. Who among us today would trade a week long cruise to a resort location with a week of fasting on water and weeping between the porch and the altar? Very few today. Very few then. Which Churches today have seen a growth in

attendance to prayer meetings and Bible Studies? We simply don't see the need and we simply don't have the time.

So the entire mood of the fourth century Church as a result of their new found liberty and prosperity was *"Let's just go along to get along. Let's just love everyone and God will sort it all out. It's not my job to defend the Faith- let the Pastor do that. It's not my responsibility to preserve the Church- let the Elder Board do that- I've got places to go; things to do and people to see."*

Well Brother Blair are you saying that it is better to be poor than to be rich. No, I am not saying that at all. But I am saying, and I am saying it very clearly that it *is* better to be poor and to be saved and to be on fire for God and to be faithful to Christ and to go to heaven than it is to be rich and lose your convictions lose your fire and lose your desire to serve God and go to hell.

Well can't we just do both? Can't we be blessed and still be on fire for God? Maybe so but very few actually do that. All throughout the Bible, there were no more than a handful of souls that didn't allow their prosperity to destroy their faith- very, very few. If you can do both- knock yourself out- but if you have to lose your Faith in order to be blessed- better then to be poor.

The Church in the fourth century went through this dilemma and for the most part- they failed the test. Heresy rushed into the church and the people were too blessed to even be concerned. They were too busy taking care of all the blessings to be sure that they were taking care of their relationship with God. Beloved let us not fall into that trap. Let us remain faithful. Let us remain true to God. And let us 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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