

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**

49. The History of Heresy Part 19

WOSM Monday 01/14/08

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 today- we are continuing in our study of one of the most important times of the Christian Church- a time when the Church nearly lost it's understanding of the Deity of Jesus Christ. This is what the heresy of the Arians was all about.

And as we discussed last time, the Arian Controversy of the fourth century centered around the Person of Jesus Christ. The Gnostics had argued late in the first century about the humanity of Jesus and the Church had successfully fought off that attack. The Apostle John was used primarily to defend the Faith against the Gnostic heretics in his Gospel account and in his three Epistles.

The Gnostics had attacked the Church from without. But the Arian attack against the Church was from within. This attack came from men who did just exactly what Jude said that they were going to do- they crept in unaware- disguised as true believers- for the express intent to destroy the Christian Faith.

And as we discussed last time, the Roman emperor, Constantine had publicly converted to Christianity and had made Christianity the de-fact religion of the Roman Empire. So, in one day- Christianity went from being illegal to being favored. And this sudden change had both positive and negative effects on the Church.

One of the positive effects that this favored status had was in the fact that people were no longer imprisoned and killed for serving Christ. Pastors were no longer rounded up and killed and women were not molested because their husbands were servants of Christ.

But the favored status that Constantine gave to the Christian Church also had a negative effect on the Church. Many in the Church grew complacent as a result of their new appointment and so Christianity was ripe for heresy and false teaching to come in unhindered.

So, it did. The Arians arose and began to denounce Christ's Divinity. At first their attack was seemingly innocent and even important. In order to fully denounce the error of Modalism, and uphold the Doctrine of the Trinity, the Arians thought it necessary to stress the fact that Jesus was different from the Father in His Person.

As we discussed some time ago, the Modalists ignore the Triunity of the Godhead and thus they reduce God from what the Bible reveals that He is- One in Essence while at the same time, eternally manifested in three Persons of God the Father; God the Son; and God the Holy Spirit.

So, what the Arians did at first in underlining the diversity in God's three manifested Persons and the function and operation of those three Persons was soon confused with the Arians teaching that Christ was different from the Father in both His Essence and substance. And this had the effect of making Jesus either a "lesser god" which would make Christianity polytheistic, or it made Jesus to not be Deity at all. And this was the real issue.

Because Constantine had success in all his military endeavors ever since his conversion- he attributed his success to the Christian God. So, in response to the Roman Empire's newfound success and prosperity- Constantine began to actively participate in the Church services. He said that since Christ had given him military and Empire success- Christ would now give the Church a new era of peace and prosperity.

But when the Roman Emperor went into the Church, he found that the Church was greatly divided over a Doctrinal issue about the Deity of Jesus Christ. The Arian Controversy was threatening to split the Church apart. This greatly grieved Constantine and perplexed him that Christ's Church could be divided like this.

The controversy centered around a man named Arius, who had recently been ordained as a presbyter in the Church at Alexandria Egypt in A.D. 311, which was one year before Constantine's supposed conversion.

Arius comes unto the scene here dressed as an angel of light. His first attempt at Doctrine was to do battle against the Modalists and to make sure that the Church successfully defended itself against that heresy. And that was a good thing, but Arius soon turned from being this angel of light and defender of the Faith into the real devil that he was.

Arius was extremely well liked in the Church and had a dynamic and charismatic personality. And because of his efforts against the Modalist heresy, Arius had a reputation as an eloquent and forceful defender of the Faith and an enemy of false teaching.

Alexander, the godly arch-bishop of Alexandria had promoted Arius to being a presbyter precisely because of his wonderful work that he had done in putting down the Modalists. Arius and Alexander enjoyed great fellowship and huge success together for about seven years after Arius' promotion.

But sometime around the year A.D 319 or 320, Arius heard Alexander teaching that Jesus shared the very same Nature as the Father. That while it was true that Jesus and the Father were different Persons of the one true Godhead- Alexander rightly taught that they were still one in Essence and one in Substance. So because Arius really didn't comprehend the Doctrine of the Trinity correctly, he accused Alexander of teaching Modalism.

Arius said that the only way to truly put down Modalism was to teach that Jesus had a similar but completely different Nature than the Father.

Alexander said that the true Doctrine of the Trinity was enough to reject the error of Modalism and that Jesus was different from the Father in Person and Function, but that Christ has the very same Nature and Essence of the Father because there is only one God.

So, Arius made a common error that many make today. We must be careful that we do not react to one heresy by creating another one. We need to say what the Bible says, and we must not take anything away from what it says. But we must be careful, beloved, that while we don't take anything away from what the Bible teaches- that we also do not add anything that the Bible doesn't say.

In this case- the Modalists had taken away from what the Bible clearly taught about Christ being Deity. Arius however made the fatal mistake of overreacting to Modalism by creating another heresy by adding to what the Bible says about Christ. This mistake happens all the time.

The Bible clearly teaches many things, but in our effort to honor someone or to reject something, we tend to add things or take away things and this adding and this taking away brings us into conflict with Scripture.

In Arius' effort to reject Modalism and affirm the differences of the Persons of the Godhead, Arius denied the Deity of Jesus Christ. And even when carefully counseled, Arius refused to recant and, in his refusal, Arius drifted further and further away from Biblical Truth about Christ and went deeper and deeper into heresy. Alexander tried over a series of years to bring Arius back to a Biblical view of the Deity of Christ, but Arius became more arrogant and more resistant to what the Bible revealed about Christ's Divinity.

Now the Arian controversy centered around one single Greek word. Actually, it centered around one single letter of that single Greek word. Today, many of you have heard the phrase, "*there is not one iota difference between them*". This phrase that is common today came from the Arian Controversy in the fourth century.

The word that Alexander used to describe the Deity of Jesus Christ was the Greek word, *homoousia*, which is a combination of two Greek words, *homo-* which means, "the same" and *ousia* which means, "substance". Alexander, the arch-bishop of Alexandria correctly taught that Jesus was *homoousia* with the Father- in other words- that Jesus was "of the same substance" with the Father.

Arius added one Greek letter- the letter "I", which the Greeks called the "iota" to the word, *homoousia* and it became *homoiousia*, which was a combination of two words, *homoi*, which meant, "similar" and *ousia* which meant, "substance". So, by adding just one letter to

just one word- Arius had changed the Nature of Christ from being the *same* as God to being *similar but different* from God.

So even though it was just one letter of one word, it changed everything. You see, if Jesus Christ was similar but different from the Father in substance- then either Christ was not Deity at all, or else Christianity had more than one god and was not monotheistic but was polytheistic. And if Christianity was polytheistic, then Christianity could not be correct because the Old Testament clearly teaches that God is one. So, the only avenue that remained for the Arians was to teach that Christ was more than a man, but was less than God.

Alexander said that Arius was wrong and that the Church had to affirm the Biblical Deity of Christ and excommunicate Arius and his followers. Arius taught that Alexander was wrong, and that Christ was not and could not be Deity and he asked the Church to excommunicate Alexander and his followers.

So, something had to be done. The Church couldn't leave this Controversy to itself. Either Arius was right, or Alexander was right, but both of them could not be right. The Church now had the responsibility and the duty to prove one to be wrong and the other to be right- they couldn't just forget about this issue.

This brings me to the point that underlies most all of what I have teaching about since day one and what Jude was trying to get the Church to understand.

The Church of Jesus Christ was embroiled in the Arian Controversy for years- even decades. And this controversy centered around one letter of one word. Yet the Church of Jesus Christ was willing to debate, argue, fight, struggle, and hammer out a Scriptural response to this issue over a period of decades all because of one letter of one word. This is an example of how much emphasis that the early Church placed upon the integrity of the Gospel. They were willing to tear the Church apart rather than allow heresy to stay.

Now if you and I believe that no one can be truly saved unless they hear the Gospel preached rightly, fully and fearlessly- then the integrity and the reliability of the Gospel becomes paramount. The early Church took all of the warnings in Scripture about preserving the Doctrine of the Apostles and the integrity of the Gospel to heart. They were moved by genuine love for the Truth; they were motivated by a

real desire to see souls saved; and they were compelled by the fear of God.

They dared not allow false teaching to stay in the Church- too much was at stake here. Souls would go to hell if the Gospel was corrupted. Souls would spend eternity burning in the lake of fire if the leaders of the Church didn't maintain the purity of the Gospel. And each one of these men knew that they had to stand before a holy and righteous God whose Eyes burn like flames of fire to give an account of what they had done with the Gospel while it was in their charge.

I just don't know if we have that same vision of Truth today. I am sorely afraid that we wouldn't be bothered with such a seemingly insignificant and trivial issue of one letter of one word. I wonder whether you and I would have the courage; the faithfulness; the love to be willing to tear the Church up than allow it to fall into heresy. I wonder if many of us today would simply say it isn't worth the trouble and I wonder if we would just walk away and hand the Church over to the heretics.

You may be saying to yourself, "*Brother Blair, what is the big deal?*" Many of you may be amazed as to why intelligent people would even bother to go to this length over one letter of one word. And the fact that we can't seem to see why this was important shows you how far we have already fallen.

But thank God that the men of the Church of the fourth century didn't look at Holy Scripture like we do. Thank God they were willing to fight. Thank God they were willing to defend the Truth at any and all costs. Thank God that they valued the Gospel more than anything that they owned including their own lives. Thank God that these men *were* willing to earnestly contend for the Faith that was once delivered to the saints. Because if they had been any less committed than they were- if they didn't have any more commitment to the Truth than many of us have today- the Christian Church would have been over with 1700 years ago. 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.