

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH AND HERESY

James W. Garrett

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INTRODUCTION

DEFINING “HERESY”:

The topic, *The New Testament Church and Heresy*, could be misleading. As we have demonstrated in previous papers,¹ the New Testament Greek term that we render as “heresy” is, *hairesis* (αἵρεσις), which in its verb form means “to make a choice.” It is the term rendered, “sect,” in Acts and, “factions,” in Paul’s epistles. One who produces a sect or a faction is an *hairesitikos* (αἵρετικός), anglicized as “heretic.” The formation of a sect or a faction often is the result of the propagation of a particular doctrine or teaching that sets its adherents apart from the general population. In the post-New Testament era, the term came to refer to any teaching that was not in harmony with the doctrines that had been handed down from the apostles. The doctrines that were held and believed by the Church at large came to be known as “orthodoxy.” Those teachings that were at odds with orthodoxy were known as, “heresy.”

For the purposes of this paper, we are using *heresy* in the post-New Testament sense, “teaching that is at odds with those doctrines that were

- taught by the apostles,
- believed in the early Church,
- and preserved for us in Scripture.”

We are using the term, *heresy*, to mean what Paul called, *strange doctrines*, *different doctrine*, *doctrines of demons*, *every wind of doctrine*, etc. (I Timothy 1:3; 4:1;6:3; Ephesians 4:14), as contrasted with *sound doctrine*, *our doctrine*, *the doctrine conforming to godliness*, *the doctrine of God*, etc. (I Timothy 4:6; 6:1,3; II Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1, 10).

THE NEXT BATTLE

I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet. Yet, I believe that the nature of the storm clouds on the spiritual horizon are becoming evident. In my lifetime, I have seen and have been influenced by two major battles that have consumed the Church. Each of them changed the Church environment forever. None of them were pleasant and all of them left both blessing and bitter residue in their wake. None of them could have been avoided.

In the late 19th and early 20th Century, theological liberals were taking over the colleges, seminaries, and denominational positions of influence in America and Europe. As the liberal tide grew, it appeared that the pulpits of the land would be lost to those who did not trust Scripture as a reliable source of truth. Many of the liberals rejected the existence of the supernatural. Beginning in the last quarter of the 1800’s humanistic explanations were being put forth for every supposed miracle in the Bible. Even some Sunday School literature reflected the

¹ *Division in the Local Church, A New Testament Perspective* (2003 Conclave paper); *Didaskalos: The Teacher* (2000 Conclave paper)

humanistic agenda. Wealthy foundations funded some of these efforts. It looked as if human rationalism would win the day.

God responded with two maneuvers. The Divine maneuver with which most readers of this paper are familiar is the great Pentecostal revival that began in a humble farmhouse in Kansas and a shabby meeting hall on Azusa Street in Los Angeles. The Pentecostal Revival spread rapidly throughout the U.S., spawning several new fast-growing denominations and within a few decades had taken hold on every continent. This particular maneuver of heaven was not a direct assault on liberalism. It was more of a lateral move in the battle, capturing the hearts and spirits of an enormous group of people, who became infertile ground for the tenets of liberalism. This wave of the Spirit took on various forms and expressions. Because this maneuver is familiar to this audience, I will not make extensive comment concerning its history.

God's other maneuver, equally great in its long-term results, was a direct assault on liberalism. It was executed by uncompromising biblical conservatives who took a stand for the veracity of Scripture and openly attacked the liberal establishment. Two California oilmen, Lyman and Milton Stewart, became greatly disturbed by the rising tide of liberalism that they saw in their church. In 1909, God moved on their hearts to underwrite the expenses of issuing a twelve volume series that would set forth the fundamentals of the Christian faith. This set of books, published from 1910 through 1915, was titled, *The Fundamentals*. It was sent free to every preacher, missionary, Sunday School superintendent, and every aggressive worker for Christ throughout the English-speaking world. Three million volumes were distributed. Those who adhered to the traditional biblical doctrines set forth in these books came to be known as "Fundamentalists." The resulting movement became known as, "Fundamentalism."

In 1919, from May 25 to June 1, six thousand people (a huge crowd for that period) met in Philadelphia at "The World Conference on Christian Fundamentals." Delegates came from forty-two states and most of the Canadian provinces. Seven foreign countries were represented. R.B. Riley, one of the more prominent speakers, declared that this meeting was "...an event of more historical moment than the nailing up, at Wittenburg, of Martin Luther's ninety-five thesis."

Several important and long-lasting things came out of this movement. For example, the *Scotfield Reference Bible*, which became the standard text for those who held to a dispensational eschatology, was a product of this era. The Stewart brothers funded the founding of a new school, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (now Biola University), which was dedicated to the faithful propagation of the "faith once delivered to the saints." The Bible college movement, which produced hundreds of Bible colleges and Bible institutes in America, was a product of the liberal/fundamentalist controversy.

Be that as it may, the battle was joined and no quarter was given or received. Theological liberalism still exists today, but it has been losing ground since the beginning of the Pentecostal and Fundamentalist Movements. Bible-believing Christians out-number liberal Christians. In many denominations, theological liberals control headquarters, but biblical conservatives own the pew.

Sadly, the negative fall-out from this battle was significant. When propositional truth became the focus, some denominations began arguing over uncertain doctrines. Secondary issues became tests of fellowship. Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals were adversaries. Even among

Pentecostals, where one would think that the emphasis on the Holy Spirit would have produced unity, the opposite happened. New denominations formed and then split into more denominations, some disfellowshipping those who left to form new organizations. In many quarters, Christianity became rancorous. My home church was in the thick of the battle in the 1930's and 40's. We fought for the right side and won. However, the residue of that battle forever changed the church. Arguing and debate became the brand of Christianity that survived the conflict. Love was a word in I Corinthians 13, not a prevailing condition in the church.

Out of Fundamentalism, came the great Neo-Evangelical Movement, that exploded after World War II. The Evangelical Movement emphasized a "born again" experience and was less judgmental of differences in eschatology, Pentecostal experiences, and denominational distinctives.

Although there were small and, in some instances, isolated battles in the intervening years, the next all-out assault took place in the 1960's and 1970's. The Vietnam War and all that surrounded it forever changed Western society. Satan unleashed his biggest guns. There always had been demonic spirits in America, but when some veterans came back from Vietnam, it seems that demons accompanied them and demonic activity increasingly became obvious. The drug culture, in a form never before seen in this country, suddenly flourished and began capturing the youth. Anarchy among the young exploded all over the civilized world. Eastern religions, whether using traditional names and forms or masquerading as the New Age Movement, sprung up everywhere. It was the "Age of Aquarius," and it was borne along on some of the most compelling music ever written (it seems that music is loved by both Satan and God). "Make love (sex) not war," was the slogan and hordes quickly adhered to that motto. A real spiritual battle was on.

As one who was in church leadership at the time, I can testify to the bewilderment that all of us experienced. Everything seemed to happen at once and we did not know how to deal with this entirely new and unfamiliar landscape. Many of us, Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal, were still back in the Fundamentalist/Liberal battle.

In response to Satan's offensive (or perhaps, coincidentally with it), God unleashed the Holy Spirit in a manner not seen since Pentecost, exceeding even the outpouring that occurred at the beginning of the century. The warriors that God called forth into this battle were not intellectual giants, as had been the leaders of the Fundamentalist Movement, nor were they the poorer classes of society, as had been typical of the Parham/Seymour Pentecostal outpouring. Believers of every stripe and social group found themselves encountering life in the Spirit. God's warriors in this battle were those who were vessels of the Holy Spirit and who were not content to be a part of a church structure that contained anything that was not "real." Many were from the hippie culture who took the same anti-establishment zeal that had characterized their youth culture and put that zeal into the Jesus Movement. Roaming bands of Holy Spirit zealots were as characteristic of the movement as were Spirit-filled churches. In this "Charismatic Movement," as it came to be called, walls came down between members of denominations and there was hope that "we are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord," was going to become more than just a song sung in Charismatic meetings. Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, and believers of almost every ilk, suddenly became brothers because they were sharing an experience. "What do you believe," was replaced by, "Have you got it, Brother?"

At the great 1977 General Conference of the Holy Spirit, held in Kansas City, 50,000 people from every possible Christian stripe gathered nightly in Arrow Head Stadium. Standing together on the platform one night, in an unprecedented demonstration of unity, were Cardinal Suenens (Roman Catholic), Thomas Zimmerman (Assemblies of God), J.O. Patterson (Church of God in Christ), and Archbishop Bill Burnett (Anglican). The 1977 Kansas City conference was the greatest ecumenical gathering that has ever taken place in the entire history of Christianity.²

Although the intensity of this conflict diminished after about two decades, it still is being fought, but in a less dramatic fashion. It is not the center of attention, as it was prior to 1990. Many very positive things resulted from this conflict, including an increased awareness of Satan's maneuvers, an increased emphasis on the New Birth, a wider acceptance of prophecy, a general belief that the gifts of the Holy Spirit operate today (there would be differences as to what this means), a genuine desire on the part of many to divest the church of the accouterments of man and to seek genuine New Testament Christianity, etc.

The negative residue includes such things as a tendency to reject authority, the elevation of nonconformity (a part of the movement drifted into inappropriate control, for a season), little respect for the past (it is as if the Church were born yesterday), and a general devaluing of doctrine. Doctrine is seen by many as being divisive and "after all, we just all want to get along." For many, feelings are valued and sought after more than accurate, absolute truth.

With this devaluing of doctrine, came a plethora of heresy, accompanied by moral and lifestyle standards that are contrary to Scripture.

Thus, as we lift our eyes to the horizon, we find that the clouds of the next conflict are not far away; some already are upon us and skirmishes are taking place. The next conflict facing the Church will be a conflict over doctrine, relating both to belief and life style.

This is not the first time that this war has been waged. It first was waged during the lifetime of the apostles. A second wave of attack came in the early post-apostolic period, in the Second, Third, and Fourth Centuries. In response to these attacks, early Christians produced the early creeds, some as early as two or three years after the Pentecostal birth of the Church. Interestingly, most of the heresies that crop up today are old heresies in modern garb.

The story of these battles, then and now, is the material that we will examine in this paper.

² Efforts to maintain the Holy Spirit ecumenical movement never again achieved the success of Kansas City. The last significant gathering of this type was the North American Congress on the Holy Spirit and World Evangelism, held in New Orleans in July 1987, on the 10th anniversary of Kansas City. I (James Garrett) was on the planning committee for the New Orleans conference. Attendance at the New Orleans conference was far below what was expected, and funds to cover the cost had to be solicited after conference. New Orleans was the last of the efforts to hold a General Conference of Charismatics.

PART ONE:

The Faith Once For All Delivered To The Saints

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.⁴ 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.³

Implications of “once for all.”

Jude had planned to write a treatise or an epistle on the subject of salvation, something of highest interest to all Christians, when news reached him of a new danger threatening the Church. He was so alarmed by the report that he felt compelled to abandon his first project in order to warn his readers of an imminent danger. The demise of Gospel truth was being threatened by the presence of individuals who had taken the doctrine of grace and turned it into justification for unbridled behaviour. These libertines were able to embark upon their course because they had adjusted apostolic doctrine. As a result, they defiled the flesh, rejected authority, and reviled angelic majesties. Jude exhorted the Church to *contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all⁴ delivered to the saints.*

Two important points come to us from Jude’s exhortation:

1. There is a fixed body of doctrine that was given once for all time and it is not subject to adjustment.
2. Behaviour and conduct are determined by what one believes.

The second of these points is illustrated by Carlton Pearson, well known leader in the Charismatic Movement. Pearson’s “inclusive” theology, a form of Ultimate Reconciliation, shocked many in the Charismatic camp when he announced his new doctrine in 2003. Having adjusted the apostolic teaching on eternal damnation, Pearson now has a different view concerning homosexual behaviour. Editor J. Lee Grady, in his April 2004, FIRST WORD, column in *Charisma & Christian Life*, wrote,

“Last fall I was shocked to learn that group of charismatic church leaders were convening in Tampa, Florida, to discuss ways they could promote a homosexual agenda....They met in a ‘gay affirming’ church led by a former Assemblies of God minister. Attendees included Oklahoma-based Carleton Pearson, who made headlines last year when he announced that he had adopted a more ‘inclusive’ theology.... Pearson said he hoped gay leaders would “build silent bridges” by

³ Jude 1-4 NAS All scriptural quotes in this paper are New American Standard Version, unless noted otherwise.

⁴ The Greek term, ἄπαξ, is used here in its classical sense, “once for all,” as it is in verse 5, and in Hebrews 6:4; 9:26,27; 10:2; I Peter 3:18. See J.B. Mayor, “The General Epistle of Jude,” *The Expositors Greek New Testament*, Robertson Nicoll, ed.; (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1976 printing) Vol. V, page 255

joining the staffs of “heterosexual churches” and gradually convincing them to accept the gay lifestyle...”⁵

I cannot avoid remembering another high-profile leader in the Charismatic Movement who advocated the doctrine of Universalism or Ultimate Reconciliation. This particular teacher was one of the most influential itinerant teachers in the early days of the movement. In August 1980, he was exposed as a practicing homosexual. He even was discovered to have been seducing young men who attended church-sponsored men’s retreats.

These two well known UR advocates are illustrative of Jude’s point that doctored doctrines can result in aberrant moral standards. It was but a short step for each of these men to move from adjusting the doctrine of eternal damnation to adjusting one’s view of morality.

Graham Cooke has written,

“We need a firm grip on theology before we can experience any success at practical Christianity. Part of the problem is the failure to marry teaching to discipleship and the way that Scripture is used in the church. People base their spiritual growth and maturity on the practical sections of Scripture without internalizing the doctrinal elements. The apostle Paul’s letters are in halves: one-half doctrinal and one-half practical.

For example, Romans chapters 1-8, Ephesians chapters 1-3, and Colossians chapters 1-2 reveal what we need to know doctrinally about God, ourselves, sin, and salvation.... The practical sections of Romans chapters 12-15, Ephesians chapters 4-6, and Colossians chapters 3-4 describe what we need to do to live out our faith in daily experience.

Leaders try to correct people’s behavior by jumping to the practical sections of the Bible. We get speakers to come, who may be mainly preachers with a blessing ministry, to minister to the church. We want a “quick fix,” or we are looking for something to happen... We don’t have time for theology and thought. We want a practical solution and we want it *now!*⁶

What one believes about God Himself (theology), influences almost all other beliefs. How one views the creation, how one views the gender debate, how one views church leadership, how one views marriage, how one understands salvation, these and a host of present day debates reflect different concepts of God. It is important for us to be concerned about the truth. Every believer should seek a true knowledge of God, both conceptually and experientially. His life will be a reflection of the Divinity whom he serves.

⁵ J. Lee Grady, “Heretics Among Us,” *Charisma & Christian Life*, April 2004, Volume 29, Number 9, page 6

⁶ Graham Cooke, *A Divine Confrontation* (Shippensburg, PA, Destiny Image Publishers, Inc. 1999) page 10

Doctrinal Authority In The Early Church

The study of the doctrines proclaimed in the early Church are important for us. After all, they were the recipients of the *faith which was once delivered unto the saints*. Jesus told the Eleven that after His ascension they were to be his witnesses and that the Holy Spirit would uniquely give them the ability to remember and understand the things that He had spoken to them (John 14:25-26; 16:13-14; et al.). They, in turn, were to pass on this information to those who would believe through their witness (John 17:20-21). In the First Century, the apostles were the source of doctrinal truth. What they taught and preached was the *faith which was once delivered to the saints* (Jude 3).

Men who had known the apostles were called, “apostolic men.” Apostles and apostolic men (Mark and Luke, for example) inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote the documents that we call *The New Testament*, thus preserving in written form the *once delivered* Holy Spirit revelation. Through the New Testament Scriptures, the apostles have continued to be the vehicle through which the Holy Spirit imparts to the Church all essential matters of doctrine.

THE IMMEDIATE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Since Our Lord is the measure of all things, we must give to Scripture the same credibility and authority that He gave to it. Jesus quoted from every section of the Sacred Jewish Scriptures and quoted them as if they were true, accurate, and the Word of God. For that reason, the Old Testament always was recognized as Scripture by the early Church. When Paul wrote to Timothy, *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness*⁷ he certainly was referring to the Old Testament, although he also may have had in mind the apostolic writings that were just beginning to emerge.

Paul, himself, wrote the first documents that later became the New Testament Scriptures. It is significant to note that Peter classed Paul’s letters as “Scripture.”

*and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.*⁸

Other writers of the New Testament Scriptures began producing their documents within a decade of Paul’s first epistles. The production of New Testament Scriptures continued until the final days of John the Apostle. John’s Gospel and Epistles were written between 85 A.D. and 95 A.D. (possibly 99 A.D).

Paul himself regarded as Scripture the writings of his fellow apostles. By the time Paul wrote I Timothy, other apostles and apostolic men were producing Holy Spirit inspired documents. Note the following quote in I Timothy 5:18

⁷ II Timothy 3:16

⁸ II Peter 3:15-16

For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

In this verse, Paul quotes two sources:

- Deuteronomy 25:24, *You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing*
- Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7 *The laborer is worthy of his wages*

Paul called both quotations, the one from Deuteronomy and the one from the Matthew and Luke, "Scripture."⁹

Paul wrote this letter to Timothy sometime between 64 and 67 AD. Matthew and Luke usually are considered to have been written around 60 AD. If that is correct, Paul classed these Gospels as, "Scripture," between 4 and 7 years after they were written. As soon as the words left the pen of Matthew and Luke, they were regarded as Scripture.

The Significance of the Canon

Much has been made by some that the canon of the New Testament was not "officially" established until many years after the close of the apostolic age. According to those who make this an issue the early Church had no certain scriptural guide or scriptural authority until two centuries or more after Pentecost. Such a contention presents a false picture.

The English word, *canon*, is derived from the Greek word, *kanon* (κανών) which goes back to the Hebrew *kaneh* (קנה), meaning, "a reed." This is the word from which we get the English term, *cane*. A length of reed often was used as a measure or standard. The word, *kanon*, also was used in reference to a list or an index. Thus, in reference to Christianity, the *canon*, refers to the list of books approved for inclusion in the Bible.

There is an important difference between *canon* and *authority*. Neil Lightfoot accurately states,

"Its Bible was the Old Testament and its new teachings were based upon the authority of Christ as personally mediated through the apostles.¹⁰ ... When Paul, for example, writes to the Corinthians, his letter is to be acknowledged as possessing divine authority (I Corinthians 14:37).¹¹ This letter had authority from the moment he wrote it, yet it could not be referred to as canonical until it was later received in a list of accepted writings formed sometime later. At a later time, it was accepted as canonical because of its inherent authority. A book first has divine authority based on its inspiration, and then attains canonicity due to its general acceptance as a divine product. No church council by its decrees can make the books of the Bible authoritative. The books of the Bible possess their

⁹ Leviticus 19:13 and Deuteronomy 24:15 often are cited as the source that Paul is quoting. However, these two passages do not use the language used by Paul. They merely prohibit keeping a man's wages overnight. Luke 10:7 contains the exact wording that Paul uses and Matthew 10:10 is identical except for one word.

¹⁰ Neil Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books) 2003, page 156

¹¹ *If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.*

own authority and, indeed, had this authority long before there were any councils of the church.”¹²

The study of the canon is an interesting and involved study which would lead us astray from the purpose of this paper. For a brief overview of the development of the canon, see ADDENDA A.

The point of this discussion is that as soon as an apostle or apostolic man wrote what was inspired by the Holy Spirit, that document immediately was viewed as Scripture and was authoritative. Because some strange interpretations of those documents began to come forth early, all Scripture had to be interpreted in harmony with the primitive creeds, *The Rule of Faith*, or the traditions of the elders.

THE EARLIEST DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY

Although the Divinely inspired New Testament documents always had preeminent authority in the Church, most local churches initially did not have all of these documents. This was true for two reasons:

- First, the production of New Testament Scriptures did not begin until the Church was twenty years old and was not completed until the last decade of the century.¹³
- All documents had to be copied by hand before they could be distributed, and so the copies available in any given locality would be limited.

Even during the Second Century, few churches, if any at all, had all of the Sacred Writings that we call, The New Testament. Some of the writings were available in one area but not in another.¹⁴ Some were accepted by churches in one area, but were not accepted in other areas. It took a few years for all of the literature in our New Testament to be accepted by all of the church in every place.

The Rule of Faith

During the years that the New Testament was being assembled, there were other sources of sound doctrine. One was a brief summary called, *The Rule of Faith*, popularly called, *The Rule*, and in some areas, *The Roman Rule*. The *Rule of Faith* consisted of doctrine orally transmitted from one generation of leaders to the next. Early leaders held the view that for doctrine to be sound, it must not violate the *Rule of Faith*. The early Church read the Bible and understood it through the tradition of the *Rule of Faith*. Any exegesis that violated the *Rule of Faith* was considered heretical. Christopher Hall writes,

¹² Lightfoot, page 156

¹³ Either Paul’s First Epistle to the Thessalonians or his Epistle to the Galatians was the first New Testament Scripture to be written. The earliest that these could have been written was 50 – 51 A.D. Pentecost, the birthday of the New Testament Church, occurred in 30 A.D. The last portion of the New Testament to be completed were written in the final decade of the century by John the Apostle.

¹⁴ Because of this situation, public reading of the Scriptures was an important part of the public meeting.

“The Fathers worked only a few generations after the apostles. They read their Bibles in the light of the Rule of Faith, an outline statement of Christian belief that circulated in the Second Century, stating the essential contents of the faith. This Rule, thought to have originated in the time of the apostles, was established as a guide to biblical exegesis and ward off heretical teachings.

They also knew how the Bible had been used in worship since the apostles, and they grew up reading, chanting, hearing these texts themselves... The fathers are important because they're much nearer than we are to the apostolic world, in which Scripture had shaped the Church¹⁵.”

The earliest written record of the contents of the *Rule* is found in chapter 9 of Ignatius *Letter to the Trallians*, written around 107 A.D. It appears in two forms. Its shorter form in this particular epistle reads as follows,

“Stop your ears, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was truly born, and did eat and drink. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; He was truly crucified, and [truly] died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. He was also truly raised from the dead, His Father quickening Him, even as after the same manner His Father will so raise up us who believe in Him by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not possess the true life.”¹⁶

The *Rule of Faith* was later formalized into what we now have as *The Apostles Creed* which some scholars believe was produced in some form in about 120 AD. We will discuss this at length later in this paper.

Primitive Creedal Statements

Because the New Testament Scriptures were not readily available for every believer, matters of faith were distilled into short creedal statements that could be remembered and repeated. These were but another form of the propositional statements contained in *The Rule*. Most New Testament scholars detect some of these primitive creeds in the sermons recorded in Acts and in the epistles. These creeds were believed by every Christian and were recited by every believer. Paul and other writers of the epistles repeated them in their writing as an element in their argument concerning some tenet of the Faith. One of the better known and universally recognized is quoted by Paul in I Corinthians 15:3-5. In First Corinthians 15, Paul argued that all believers' bodies will be resurrected. He used as the springboard for his argument, this creed that had been passed down from the earliest days and was accepted by all believers.

*that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
and that He was buried,
and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,*

¹⁵ Christopher A. Hall, “The Habits of Highly Effective Bible Readers,” *Christian History*, Issue 80 (Vol. XXII, No. 4) page 9

¹⁶ As rendered in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume I, A. Roberts & J. Donaldson, editors page 140 (The Master Christian Library Version 5, Books For The Ages, Ages Software, Albany, Oregon, Version 2.0) 1997

*and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*¹⁷

To this, Paul then appends other traditions about several resurrection appearances that round-out his personal concerns in the argument that he is presenting in I Corinthians 15.¹⁸

Paul did not receive the Gospel from men, but from the glorified Christ Himself. After his conversion, he spent a short time in Damascus, then went to Arabia for a season, where the Lord imparted the Gospel to him. Paul returned to Damascus and then traveled to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:11-2:2). If the aforementioned formula in I Corinthians 15 is an early creedal motto of the Church, Paul probably encountered it in Damascus, or on his visit to Jerusalem. The Gospel which Paul defended in the Galatian Epistle was based on the truths contained in the creed which he quoted in I Corinthians 15:3-5. Every church in every place held to these creeds. Thus, Paul could advance his argument in I Corinthians 15 because it was based upon that to which all agreed, even the Corinthians.

Early Church Patriarchs

Throughout most of the Second Century, churches were led by men who had known either the apostles, or apostolic men, or men who had been instructed by apostolic men. Irenaeus, for example, writing in the last quarter of the Second Century, commented that in his younger years, he had been a student of Polycarp, an apostolic man, who had been discipled by the Apostle John.¹⁹

Thus, another source of sound doctrine was the old men who were the elders and overseers of the local churches. After the death of the apostles, before the Scriptures were wide-spread, various individuals arose, teaching contradictory doctrines. Who was to determine what was true and what was false? In most places, the church looked to an older man who had known an apostle, or had known an apostolic man, or who had been instructed by one who had. These men became the authorities in the early Second Century. The common testimony of these men was an assurance to the early church that the truth was being preserved and propagated. This is one of the chief reasons why the role of “overseer,” as distinct from “elder” came into existence. The one who was the oldest and who had the earliest recollection of the doctrines being passed down was designated as the one who would be the arbiter of doctrine and frequently was given a role that set him somewhat apart from the rest of the elders. Both Ignatius (writing around 107 AD) and Irenaeus (writing in around 185 AD) argued that some sort of hierarchy would be the best defense against heresy and promote true doctrine.

¹⁷ Gordon Fee succinctly describes the creedal pattern in these lines: [The creed] has four lines, each introduced with a ὅτι (*hoti*) [“that”], thus emphasizing the content of each line. The four lines are in two nearly perfect sets of Semitic parallels. Lines 1 and 3, which describe the death and resurrection of Jesus, correspond formally, including the phrase “according to the Scriptures”; lines 2 and 4 respond respectively to lines 1 and 3, warranting their content. Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans) 1987 page 723

¹⁸ We are using the term, “traditions,” in the biblical sense. The *paradosis* (παράδοσις) refers to written or oral communication of facts. Thus, all truth passed from one generation to the next, or from one to person to another is *paradosis*.

¹⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 3, Chapter 3, Paragraph 4

Irenaeus, in his, *Against Heretics*, used the argument that the universal body of truth, handed down and preserved in the churches from one generation of elders to the next, was the measure of truth and heresy.

“True knowledge is the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient order of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the overseers, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place, and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved without any forging of Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine, and neither allowing addition nor removal; and reading without falsification, and a lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures, both without danger and without blasphemy; and the pre-eminent gift of love, which is more precious than knowledge, more glorious than prophecy, and which excels all the other gifts.”²⁰

Describing the attitude of heretics, Irenaeus wrote,

“But, again, when we refer them to that tradition from the Apostles and which is preserved in the churches by the successions of elders then they oppose tradition, claiming to be wiser not only than the elders, but even than the Apostles , and to have discovered the truth undefiled.”²¹

In the Third Century, Tertullian offers a similar argument against the innovative doctrines being propagated in his era.

“Now the substance of their preaching, that is, Christ’s revelation to them, in my judgment must be approved only through the testimony of those churches which the Apostles founded by preaching to them both when they were alive and afterwards by their letters. If this is so, it is likewise clear that all doctrine which accords with these apostolic churches, the sources and origins of faith, must be reckoned as truth, since it maintains without doubt what the churches received from the Apostles, the Apostles from Christ, and Christ from God... We are in communion with the apostolic churches because there is no difference of doctrine. This is our guarantee of truth.”²²

Speaking of heretical doctrine that is at variance with things generally taught, he states,

“It originates neither from an Apostle nor from an apostolic man; for the Apostles would not have diverged from one another in doctrine; no more would the apostolic man have put out teaching at variance with that of the Apostles.”²³

Unfortunately, in the centuries that followed, this concept of Apostolic Succession and the Authority of Tradition was codified into what became the Roman Catholic Church. Early on, however, before the New Testament Scriptures had been universally recognized

²⁰ Irenaeus, Book 4, Chapter 33, Section 8

²¹ Irenaeus, *Against Hertics*, Book 3, Chapter 2, Section 2

²² Tertullian, Prescription Against Heretics 21

²³ Tertullian, Prescription Against Heretics 32

and universally distributed, the “tradition” passed on by the elders was an important element in preserving the truth.

The point of all of this is that the early Church was very careful to preserve the truths that had been imparted by the apostles. Doctrine was important from the very first.

CONCLUSION TO PART ONE

The New Testament Church and the Post-New Testament Church looked to three things as authority in doctrine.

1. The primitive creeds, which were summed up in *The Rule of Faith*;
2. The overseers who had known the apostles or apostolic men and the traditions that they passed on;
3. The literature that we now know as the New Testament.

That there was harmony between these three sources is attested to by many documents from that era. The Church at large rejected as false any interpretation of Scripture that was not consistent with the *Rule* or the tradition of the elders.

PART TWO

The Pillar And Foundation Of The Truth

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. (I Timothy 3:14-15 NIV)

The Church in a Post-Christian Society

Pilate asked Our Lord, "*So You are a king?*"

Jesus replied, "*You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice. "*

Pilate responded, "*What is truth?*"²⁴

Pilate was a pragmatist. His attitude was, *the truth is what works*. When the Romans conquered a people, they usually did not interfere with the indigenous religion. By allowing a people to continue with their religion, the Romans had one less problem with which to deal. They interfered with a conquered people's religion only when that religion interrupted the collecting of taxes or fomented rebellion. What a people believed was truth for that people. What another group believed was truth for that group.

Pilate, the Roman politician, spoke in a pre-Christian era. Most Twenty-First Century western nations live in a post-Christian era; the attitude is the same as Pilate's pre-Christian attitude.

- You have your truth, and I have my truth
- Neither of us will impose our truth on anybody else.
- There are no inherent absolutes.
- Society can pass laws that become absolutes for that society.

This post-Christian philosophy was clearly demonstrated in how radio and television handled the Gary Condit/Sandra Levy situation. Gary Condit didn't just have a moment of weakness and broke his marriage vows in a one-night stand. No, he had series of extra-marital sexual relationships. He is a full-blown adulterer. Gary Condit is what the KJV calls a "whoremonger." To my knowledge, he never has shown repentance for his adultery. He brazenly continued on his way.

When most of the talk-show hosts dealt with the topic of Gary Condit (even some who are "conservative"), they always were careful to emphasize that they were not making an issue of Gary Condit's adulterous behavior. They did take issue with the fact that he lied to the police. Notice the moral standard that is conveyed by this approach, i.e. *If you commit adultery, that is your business, it's a matter of personal morals and I will not condemn your morals. However, lying to the police is against the law (society has passed a law to that effect) and in our society, we take issue with that.*

²⁴ John 18:37

In a world that increasingly is becoming post-Christian and postmodern, the downward spiral of society is quite obvious. For example, pedophilia, what most generations have viewed as the ultimate, unthinkable evil, is vying for acceptance. Many nations, instead of trying to curb AIDS by abstinence, try to find ways to make promiscuity riskless.

In such a world, the Church is called upon to be the *Pillar and Foundation of the Truth*.

THE GROWING CHALLENGE

Of special significance for the Church in our time is the growing move toward a one-world government. The European Union recently set aside the constitution that was upon the table and began considering a new one. The new constitution, authored by a man named, Descartes, has removed all references to the role played by Christianity in the development of European Civilization. Some American politicians, who have a one-world government bent, are trying to quietly move through congress seemingly innocuous bills that ultimately would subject Americans to the World Court. The One World Government scenario no longer is just a creative exposition of Revelation, put forth by a Christian Fundamentalist Dispensationalist. It is on the table. If these plans succeed, it will become increasingly difficult for the Church to uphold the truth – martyrdom may become a reality in every country, not just in Muslim nations.

Even Roman Catholicism is equivocating on the exclusivity of the claims of Jesus, *I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the father but by Me*. (John 14:6)

The latest, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994),²⁵ reflects in several sections of Part One a softening of the doctrine of the necessity of faith in Christ. For example, here is the statement on Muslims.

841 *The Church's relationship with Muslims*. “The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day.”²⁶

842 *The Church's bond with non-Christian religions* is in the first place the common origin and end of the human race:

All nations form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth, and also because all share common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all against the day when the elect are gathered together in the holy city...²⁷

After referring to the oft repeated statement by the Church Fathers, that “outside the Church there is no salvation,” the new *Catechism* deals with the problem of exclusivity by saying, “Re-formulated positively, it [the statements of the Fathers] means that all salvation comes from

²⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO, Liguori Publications) 1994

²⁶ Ibid, page 223

²⁷ Ibid, page 223

Christ the Head through the Church which is His Body.” (846)²⁸ In the elaboration of this statement, the *Catechism* states, “Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ would refuse either to enter it or remain in it.” In other words, instead of the proposition that no one can be saved unless he is in the Church, the proposition is changed to “those who do not know, in their hearts, that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God, through Christ, are not necessarily damned.” The next Section (847) states, “This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and His Church.”²⁹

Whether or not one agrees with the traditional Roman Catholic view of the exclusivity of its authority to say who is saved (i.e., only faithful Roman Catholics), the present view expresses the growing attitude of blurring the lines of truth and the fading of absolutes. This attitude, growing in the Western World, does not bode well for those who hold firmly to the *faith once delivered to the saints*.

True Christianity stands in contrast to such Post-Christian, Post-Modernist ambiguity.

- In the New Testament, the Greek term for “truth, *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια), is used 110 times in the sense of absolute truth.
- Christianity declares that its statements or beliefs are true because they agree with reality (A proposition is not true because it is in the Bible; it is in the Bible because it is true).
- Scripture affirms that the truth that God reveals is knowable and should be defended rationally.

In What Way is the Church, “the pillar and foundation of the truth”?

The Greek term translated, “pillar,” is *stulos* (στῦλος), meaning, *column, pillar, support, prop*. In the familiar picture of the Greek temple on Mt. Acropolis, the massive columns holding up the roof of the temple are *stuloi*.

The word translated, “foundation,” is *edraïoma* (ἐδραίωμα), meaning, *that which makes something immoveable or steadfast*.

Thus, the *stulos* supports or upholds while the *edraïoma* does not allow movement or deviation. One might equate these to the tent pole that holds up the tent, and the tent peg that does not allow the pole to move.

THE TRUTH OF WHICH THE CHURCH IS THE PILLAR AND GROUND

First, we note that the Church is not the Pillar and Ground of *truth*, but of *the truth*. The truth that the Church supports and anchors is a particular truth..

²⁸ Ibid, page 224

²⁹ Ibid, page 224

The arch over the entrance to Harvard, quoting John 8:32, reads, *know the truth and the truth shall make you free*

The quote should have included the entire statement of Jesus,

Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."³⁰

The truth that the Church upholds and anchors first of all is the truth revealed in Jesus Christ

*Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."³¹*

The truth that the Church upholds and anchors also is the truth of the apostles' doctrine, which explains and fleshes out the truth revealed in Jesus Christ.

And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching³²

The Church is not concerned with the teaching of philosophers, psychologists, or great thinkers, except as they relate to *the truth*, of which the Church is called to be the pillar and ground. There is much truth concerning many fields of knowledge that the Bible does not address.

Some time ago, I cut down a tree. One of my grandsons, watching me wield the axe, wanted to try it. I had to teach him how. He could have read the Bible eight hours a day and never would he have learned how to use an axe.

When I dug ditches for Muskogee County, as a teenager, the first few hours were very difficult, until a man named, Dick Biggs, said, "here boy, let me show you how to use your legs to push that shovel." As a teenager, I prayed daily and read the Sermon on the Mount over and over, but that did not teach me how to use a shovel.

One could read the Bible from morning to night and never have an understanding of the valences of chemical elements, or algebra, or computer science. The Church has no business making pronouncements in matters that lie beyond its biblical mandate. There have been sad episodes in Church History when ecclesiastical authorities made dogma their pronouncements in matters in which the Bible is silent or open to interpretation. Only when experts in practical and theoretical disciplines begin to use their expertise as a platform to oppose *the truth*, should the Church get involved in those disciplines. When that happens, it becomes the business of the Church.

Another important consideration is that the Greek states that the Church is *A pillar*, not *THE pillar*. There are other pillars. God has left Himself many witnesses. Some rather absurd things have taken place from time to time in Church History when institutions or individuals other than the church began to put forth truth that contradicted some error that the institutional Church had

³⁰ John 8:31-32

³¹ John 14:6

³² Acts 2:42

accepted. The institutional Church insisted that it was THE Pillar, much like the Pharisees, because its position and authority were threatened.

As the pillar and anchor, the church is

- the repository of revealed truth
- the advocate of revealed truth
- the uncompromising anchor of revealed truth.

HOW IS THE CHURCH THE PILLAR OF TRUTH?

Newport J.D. White wrote,

“The Church... is the divinely constituted human Society by which the support and maintenance in the world of revealed truth is conditioned. Truth if revealed to isolated individuals, no matter how numerous, would be dissipated in the world. But the Divine Society in which it is given an objective existence, at once compels the world to take knowledge of it, and assures those who receive the revelation that it is independent of, and external to, themselves, and not a mere fancy of their own.”³³

The existence of the Church is a pillar of The Truth

The existence of Judaism, today, is testimony to the fact that a man named Moses lived in the Fifteenth Century BC. He is an historical figure, not just a myth or a legend.

The existence of Buddhism today is testimony to the fact that a man named Sakyamuni lived in the Sixth Century BC. He is an historical figure, not just a myth or a legend.

The existence of Islam is testimony to the fact that a man named Muhammed lived in the Sixth Century AD. He is an historical figure, not just a myth or a legend.

The existence of the Church is testimony to the fact that a man named, Jesus, lived in the First Century AD. He is a historical figure, not just a myth or a legend. The Church is a column, holding up that truth.

The message of the Church is a pillar of Truth

Not only does the existence of the Church uphold the fact that Jesus is a historical figure, but the message that the Church faithfully proclaims a “pillar of truth.” The Church declares to every nation under heaven that on the cross Jesus paid the price for our sins; He came forth from the grave, even as we someday shall do by the power of God; He ascended to the throne in heaven, at the right hand of the Father; He poured out the gift of

³³ Newport J.D. White, “The First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus,” *The Expositors Greek Testament*, Volume Four, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, reprinted 1976) p 118]

the Holy Spirit upon the Church; He is coming again to judge the living and the dead; and that there is no other name under heaven whereby men might be saved.

The Church's preservation and distribution of the Bible is a pillar of Truth

The Bible, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, exists today because the Church has been a steward of the Holy Spirit inspired writings, and has distributed the Bible to the nations.

In his discussion of the blessings and responsibilities that Israel had enjoyed, Paul wrote, *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.* (Romans 3:1-2)

The same thing could be written about the Church. We have been entrusted with the Oracles of God.

HOW IS THE CHURCH THE GROUND OF TRUTH?

As we already have seen, the Church from its very first days has *contend(ed) earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*

The Church declares that any authoritative revelation received after the death of the revelatory apostles, and apostolic men, is to be rejected.

Mormonism, for example, is immediately disqualified as a form of Christianity because of its origin. In 1827, Joseph Smith claimed that an angel named Moroni revealed to him where to find gold plates that told about Messianic visitations to America. They were inscribed in *reformed Egyptian*. No one else ever saw the plates, except in a vision. Joe Smith translated the plates, by sitting on one side of a table with a copyist on the other side of the table. There was a sheet suspended from the ceiling so that the copyist could not see the plates. The work was completed in 1829 and the plates vanished. The Book of Mormon was printed and distributed in 1830.

The beliefs of Mormonism do not need to be examined to see whether or not they pass scrutiny. The fact that this religion was birthed in 1827 is sufficient to demand its rejection.

The same thing is true of Islam, which claims a post-New Testament origin.

In response to Paul's frequent exhortation, the Church holds firm on doctrinal matters.

If we do no more than survey Paul's letters to his younger associates, Timothy and Titus, we cannot fail to reach the conclusion that the Church can brook no compromise in its doctrine.

As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay

attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. ...For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.

(I Timothy 1:3-4, 6-7)

realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. (I Timothy 1:9-11) NOTE: Behaviour is a part of the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, (I Timothy 4:1)

In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; (I Timothy 4:6-7)

Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching... Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. (I Timothy 4:13,15-16)

If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. (I Timothy 6:3-5)

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, (I Timothy 6:13-14)

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"-- which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you. (I Timothy 6:20-21)

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. (II Timothy 2:15)

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great

patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. (II Timothy 4:1-4)

... holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, 11 who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain. (Titus 1:9-11)

But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. (Titus 2:1)

Titus 3:9 But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless. 10 Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, 11 knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned. (Titus 3:9-11)

These exhortations to church leaders make it clear that in matters of doctrine, leaders have a responsibility to be firm, steadfast, and unmovable. However, the entire church has an equal responsibility. Paul wrote to the Ephesian Church that we are not to be moved about from one doctrine to another and that we are to speak correct doctrine in a loving manner.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, (Ephesians 4:14-15)

Paul did not always name the purveyors of falsehood, but at other times he named names

Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme. (I Timothy 1:20)

No Christian, especially one in leadership, has the liberty to come up with new and innovative beliefs and ideas. The Faith was delivered to the saints, once for all.

CONCLUSION TO PART TWO

The Church has two primary commissions:

- The commission to preach the Gospel and make disciples in every nation (Matthew 28:18-20, etc.)
- To be a pillar and anchor of the truth.

Neither of these can be neglected.

Part Three

The History of Significant Heresies

From the standpoint of the Church, heresy is the mother of two evils. The first of these is division in the Body of Christ. We noted in the Introduction that the underlying meaning of the Greek word that we translate, “heresy,” is division. Paul warned the Ephesian elders,

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. (Acts 20:29-31)

False doctrine put forth by teachers who gain a following is a major cause of separation between brethren.

The second evil birthed by heresy is the loss of salvation that can result from false doctrine.

Paul is very strong in his language concerning such teaching. Note just one example:

Paul, an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), 2 and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:1-12)

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. (Galatians 5:1-4)

In this passage, Paul decries false salvation doctrine. What one believes is important. Heaven and hell hang in the balance.

Significant Heresies in the Early Church

In the following pages, we will survey the major false teachings that troubled the early Church. We will confine our survey to those that

1. caused division
2. distorted the true picture of God
3. distorted the understanding of Christ
4. could lead to loss of salvation.
5. are seen today in contemporary garb

The well known axiom states, “those who are ignorant of the past are destined to repeat the past.”

THE ORIGIN OF HERESIES

Several motivations and circumstances produced the early heresies:

1. Only portions of Scripture were available in certain regions
2. A common desire to understand the mystery of God
3. An effort to explain the person of Jesus
4. An effort to make Christianity acceptable to society
5. The lust for something new and deeper
6. A desire to gain a following
7. Pride and rebellion against the establishment

Number three in this list, the effort to explain the person of Jesus produced many of the major heresies. Some of the most important were efforts to explain how the Son could be God, or at least called God, and yet not be a second God, alongside the Father. Four of the most prominent were:

1. Adoptionism: The Son and the Holy Spirit are specially endowed agents of the Father who adopted Jesus’ body
2. Neoplatonism: The Son and the Holy Spirit are emanations of the Father, descending into the concrete world.
3. Sabellianism: the Son is the Father, who presents himself in another mode
4. Arianism: The Son and the Holy Spirit are created beings, and are intermediate between the Father and mankind.

The unintended benefit of heresies

1. Heresies were a reaction to the common belief and doctrinal understandings of the Christian community (orthodoxy).
2. Orthodoxy, seeking to preserve the salvation that we find in Christ, defined the common faith by producing various creeds and clear formulations of belief. These would not have been produced had not heresy challenged the common understanding.

3. As subsequent heresies and aberrant teaching began to trouble the Church, subsequent creeds were composed.
4. The creeds are not authoritative as Scripture is authoritative, but they do clarify how the early Christians understood biblical truth.

The First Heresy: Judaizing teachers – propagators of legalism

Legalism was the first heresy faced by the Church. It was promulgated by those who sought to blend Judaism with faith in Christ and His atonement.

Any student of the New Testament is very familiar with this heresy because it is so prominent in the New Testament record. Paul's letter to the Galatians and his letter to the Romans were written as polemics against this heresy.

Stated simply, legalism declares,

Salvation hinges not only on our faith in Christ and His atonement, but also on some external act, behaviour, or ceremony. God has to accept us because of some cause other than, or in addition to, the cross of Jesus Christ.

The Judaizing teachers insisted on circumcision, and the keeping of dietary laws.

Legalism is embedded in our human nature. Paul calls it *elementary principles of the world* (KJV *rudiments of the world*).

Colossians 2:8 *See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the **elementary principles of the world**, rather than according to Christ.*

Colossians 2:18 *Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, ...20 If you have died with Christ to the **elementary principles of the world**, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.*

Philippians 3:3 *for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and **put no confidence in the flesh**,*

The history of the church testifies to the fact that legalism is a part of our human nature. Asceticism has been almost synonymous with the term, Christian, in some circles. In his marvelous biography of Martin Luther, *Here I Stand*, Roland Bainton describes the asceticism in pursuit of heavenly reward that prevailed in Luther's lifetime.

Here were young Carthusians, mere lads, already aged by their austerities. At Magdeburg, Luther looked upon the emaciated Prince

William of Anhalt, who had forsaken the halls of the nobility to become a begging friar and walk the streets carrying the sack of the mendicant. Like any other brother he did the manual work of the cloister. “With my own eyes I saw him,” said Luther. “I was fourteen years old at Magdeburg. I saw him carrying the sack like a donkey. He had so worn himself down by fasting and vigil that he looked like a death’s-head, mere bone and skin. No one could look upon him without feeling ashamed of his own life.”³⁴

One of the modern illustrations of legalism is the dress code of some Pentecostal groups and a number of Anabaptist groups.

Another very common expression of legalism is the view held by some with regard to baptism. This is true both of many pedobaptists as well as some groups that insist on believer’s baptism. Because of its prevalence, we will use this as an example of a legalistic heresy.

Clearly, the pattern of salvation in the New Testament culminates in baptism. There are nine cases of conversion in Acts and everyone of them has preaching as the beginning and baptism as the concluding element. Today, baptism has been downplayed in a manner that is close to heresy. Evangelicalism invented the *sinner’s prayer* (something that is totally unbiblical) and has made it the culminating act of salvation, in place of baptism.

However, the opposite error occurs when baptism is presented in a legalistic manner (water regeneration).

What is the correct view of baptism?

Colossians 2:10-13 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions

Notice that Paul equates immersion with circumcision. V 11-12. Circumcision under the law was a surgical act done on the human flesh – human flesh was removed. The circumcision of Christ is not something that removes flesh, but it is an outward expression of an inner faith, that outward expression being immersion.

In the Greek of Colossians 2:10-13, the circumcision of Christ is contingent upon *having been buried with Him in baptism*.

The church tradition in which I grew up presented baptism as the most important element in the salvation pattern. I Peter 3:21 and Acts 2:38 were preached and quoted Sunday after

³⁴ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I stand* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1950) pgs 24-25

Sunday. Baptism was preached more than faith in Christ. I must confess that in my earlier years, programmed by that tradition, I was guilty of that error. Dare I call it a heresy?

1 Peter 3:21 *And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,*

Acts 2:38 *And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

What is the relationship between immersion and salvation?

Romans 4:1-11 *What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."*

4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: 7 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. 8 "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account."

9 Is this blessing then upon the circumcised, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say, "Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness." 10 How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;

11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them,

According to Colossians 2:10-13, as we already have seen, immersion to the Christian is like circumcision to one who was under the Abrahamic covenant. In the Romans 4:1-11 passage, Paul demonstrated that circumcision was a seal of righteousness, not the cause of righteousness. Thus, immersion alone is not what saves us. It is faith, expressed through immersion as a seal or outward expression of the faith in our hearts. It is God's commanded outward expression. To fail to immerse a convert just as soon as is possible is to disobey Christ and to ignore the biblical example.

However, there are those who have elevated immersion to the place that the impression is given that immersion is the act that saves us. Those who do this usually consider themselves to be the only true believers; they sever themselves from the community of believers over this issue. Since this false doctrine has caused division in the church, it properly could be called a heresy. It is a form of legalism.

Just as legalistic are pedobaptists who trust in the baptism of an infant to make that infant a member of the covenant community. Some Reformed Churches hold this view, as well as Roman Catholics (confirmation does follow at a later age).

The same could be said concerning the Roman Catholic and some Protestant denominations' teaching of the sacraments. The sacramental view holds that there is spiritual power in a physical entity; there is power in the very water used in baptism; there is meritorious power in the unleavened bread and the wine in communion. Thus, there is an external element that makes us worthy in God's eyes, or compels God to accept us.

Heresy at the close of the First Century: Greek Philosophers – the propagators of Gnosticism.

The Greek word for *knowledge* is γνῶσις (*gnosis*). A Greek philosophy/religion arose in the First Century, claiming to have a higher, secret knowledge, a *gnosis*.

The Gnostic movement had two prominent features:

1. The claim to present a secret lore, that explained otherwise incomprehensible mysteries;
2. The assertion that its secrets are accessible only to the elite. All who take an active interest in the movement are the elite.

Gnosticism presented itself as a supernaturally revealed, divinely guaranteed wisdom. Its background was Greek mythology. It was expressed in various ways, but one element that was present in all of its various expressions was the concept of dualism.

- good and evil
- light and dark
- flesh and spirit

In Gnosticism, the spirit is good; matter is evil.

Gnosticism had many variations, but in its classic expression, it was presented in the following fashion:

- *Autopater*, the “Self Father,” is good and is capable of only spiritual activity.
- By his spiritual activity, *nous*, meaning, Mind, proceeded from Him and produced aeons.
- One of the three highest aeons, Sophia, drew an image of an aeon, called the *Demiurge*.
- From that time onward, there were two forces in the universe. The *Urge*, which was the spiritual Father (the *Autopater*), and the *Demiurge*, which created all physical things.

The spiritual primal Father has nothing to do with base material reality. The material world can have nothing to do with the spiritual. All spiritual things proceeding from the Father, the *Urge*, inherently are good. All material things proceeded from the *Demiurge* and inherently are evil.

Those who sought to reconcile Gnosticism with Christianity declared that Christ was the offspring of Sophia. Christ revealed the Father to those who have spiritual nature and led

them to salvation by the path of enlightenment (note the similarity to present day Eastern religions.), which meant grasping Gnostic concepts.

Paul probably was referring to the Gnostic movement when he said that the preaching of the cross is folly to the Greeks –

but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness,
(1 Corinthians 1:23)

Since, according to Gnosticism all spirit is good and all material matter is evil, two different moral attitudes developed among Gnostics:

1. One group of Gnostic teachers taught asceticism – destroy the flesh by refusing to pamper it or give in to its needs.
2. Another group taught profligacy and debauchery, which expressed itself in two ways:
 - What the body does cannot touch the spirit, so the enlightened should release the body to its full hedonistic self
 - Spiritual individuals should destroy the body through profligacy and debauchery

According to the Gnostics, Christ could not have come in the flesh, since all flesh is evil and Christ is spirit. Therefore, He only appeared to have come in the flesh. He was an hallucination, a holograph. The technical term for this view is *docetism* (from the Greek term, *δοκέω* [*dokeo*] meaning, “to appear”).

The earliest beginnings of Gnosticism took place before the close of the writing of the New Testament. According to the early Church Fathers, the man who first began to teach Gnosticism among Christians was Simon Magus, the magician described in Acts 8. A rather extensive lore developed about Simon and his Gnosticism. Paul touched on the Gnostic heresy in Colossians. John’s Gospel and his First Letter were written specifically to refute this heresy, especially as it was being taught by one notable teacher, Cerinthus.

Irenaeus records Polycarp’s report of an encounter between John the Apostle and Cerinthus.

There are also those who heard from him that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, “Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.”³⁵

The prologue to John’s Gospel, John 1:1-18, declaring that the Word became flesh stands in opposition to Gnosticism (The Word, *became*, not just *entered*). Many of the difficult sayings in John’s letters become clear, when this background is understood.

I John 1:1-3 is in direct opposition to Gnosticism

³⁵Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, 3, 4 (translated by Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut from *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), vol. 1).

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life - and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

I John 4:1-2 is a strong direct statement against Gnosticism

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;

When Our Lord was upon the earth, demons acknowledged Him as coming in the flesh (for example, the Gadarene demoniac: Matthew 8:28-24; Mark 5:1-17; Luke 8:26-17). The demons that attacked the Seven Sons of Sceva in Acts 19, since they were acknowledging the Jesus that Paul preached, would have acknowledged that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. How can we understand the statement, *every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God?* One explanation is that I John was written as a polemic against Gnosticism, which declared that Jesus had not come in the flesh. It was advice to the particular group to whom it was written.

When Christians think that there is hidden or secret knowledge that is available only to the elite, or the informed, rather than to all believers, then they have fallen into Gnosticism.

Modern Gnostics point to Jesus' comment following the Parable of the Sower,

And as soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables. And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables, in order that 'while seeing, they may see and not perceive; and while hearing they may hear and not understand lest they return and are forgiven.'" (Mark 4:10-12 [see also, Matthew 13:10-13; Luke 8:9-10]).

In this dialogue, Jesus paraphrased several Old Testament passages that spoke of the hardening of hearts (Isaiah 6:9ff; 43:8; Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2). Some Bible teachers who lean toward a mystical approach to Scripture have developed the *Hardening Theory* as a hermeneutical approach to parables. According to this theory, parables are simple stories that can be understood by both believers and unbelievers. However, the real meaning of a parable consists of "mysteries" that belong to the church and can be uncovered only by Spirit-led prophetic allegory. Jesus' semi-allegorical explanation of the Parable of the Sower further encouraged those who put forth the *Hardening Theory*.

Since most of the parables clearly were not intended for an inner circle, the *Hardening Theory* is not a sound approach to parabolic interpretation. Note for example those instances in which the Gospels state that Jesus spoke parables *to* people. Here are three such examples from Luke:

Luke 15:3 *And He told them this parable, saying, (Greek- εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς He spoke to them)*

Luke 18:9 *And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:*

Luke 19:11 *And while they were listening to these things, He went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately (the parable was told to correct their understanding).*

Jesus usually used parables to illustrate a point, and the parables were understood by His target audience. For example the Lawyer understood the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The Pharisees and the chief priests conspired to kill Jesus because they understood the parable of the tenants (Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-20).

Gordon Fee points out that one of the keys to understanding Jesus' statement in Mark 4:10-12, is the realization that Jesus spoke Aramaic. The language of Palestine was Aramaic. The New Testament is written in Greek. Therefore, when the Gospel writers quoted Jesus, they had to translate His Aramaic statement into Greek.

“If the parables, then, are not allegorical mysteries for the church, what did Jesus mean in Mark 4:10-12 by the mystery of the kingdom and its relationship to parables? Most likely the clue to this saying lies in a play on words in Jesus’ native Aramaic. The word, *methal* which was translated *parabole* in Greek was used for a whole range of figures of speech in the riddle, puzzle, parable category, not just of the story variety called “parables” in English. Probably verse 11 meant that the meaning of Jesus’ ministry (the secret of the kingdom) could not be perceived by those on the outside; it was like a *methal*, a riddle, to them. Hence His speaking in *mathelin* (parables) was a part of the *methal* (riddle) of his whole ministry to them. They saw, but they failed to see; they heard – and even understood – the parables, but they failed to really appreciate the whole thrust of Jesus’ ministry.... Jesus was not trying to be obtuse; he fully intended to be understood.”³⁶

This is in harmony with Paul’s statement in I Corinthians 2:6-16, declaring that the things imparted by the Spirit of God can be understood only by those who have received the Spirit of God. That, of course, would be everyone who is saved.

Another teaching that has been in vogue from time to time in the Charismatic movement is the *epignosis* (ἐπίγνωσις) doctrine. The New Testament uses two terms for “knowledge,” *gnosis* (γνώσις), and the compound term, *epignosis* (ἐπίγνωσις). Some have argued that *epignosis* refers to higher or special knowledge.

³⁶ Fee, Gordon, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, Zondervan) 1993, page 137

I first encountered this doctrine several years ago while having dinner with some believers, following a church service. During dinner, a dear brother began to expound upon the *epignosis* doctrine. He cited Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:17,

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge (epignosis) of Him.

As I recall the conversation this brother's emphasis was on the prophetic understanding of Scripture, things that the Holy Spirit showed those of us who really were in the know. Fortunately, this dear brother seemed to consider me one of those "in the know."

What is wrong with this view? First, there are parallel passages in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, where one writer describing a scene uses *gnosis* and another Gospel writer, describing that scene or a similar one uses *epignosis*. The terms frequently are used interchangeably (see ADDENDA B). When there is a special need to emphasize knowing in the sense of "being aware," or "knowing by way of experience," or having "correct, accurate, knowledge," *epignosis* is used, but never is there a sense of higher or special knowledge that is not available to every believer. In the passage in Ephesians 1:17 ff, the reference is to that full awareness of the blessings that we have in Christ Jesus.

Mormonism is an obvious form of Gnosticism, in that it claims to have higher or secret knowledge, known only to those who are qualified to enter the Temple.

Christian Science is a form of Gnosticism in that it denies physical reality.

In some ways, Kenneth Hagin expresses a type of Gnosticism when he reports that God revealed to him that Adam originally was god of this world and that his sin was an act of high treason against God, which gave legal dominion over to the world of Satan.³⁷ This is purported to be "revelation knowledge," something that one obtains by a means beyond reading the Bible.

Allegory is a frequent hermeneutic used by modern day Gnostics. In the allegories all sorts of truths are seen, which are not evident to those who do not read the Bible "spiritually."

Marcionism: The effort to simplify

Marcion was a Christian in Rome in the middle of the Second Century. According to some records, he was excommunicated by a local Roman church for immorality. Not long thereafter, he began teaching his version of True Christianity. He was a great organizer and achieved a sizeable following.

Gnosticism took the relatively simple Gospel and made it incredibly complex. Marcion was a simplifier. He seized a single aspect of the NT, the conflict between faith and law, and made it into a fundamental principle that dominated everything.

³⁷ Kenneth E. Hagin, *How God Taught Me About Prosperity* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1985), pg 5, 10-15

Because of his perspective, Marcion rejected the entire Old Testament. He accepted Matthew, Mark, and most of Luke, and most of Paul's writing. What he did accept, he took to be literally true and fully authoritative.

Marcion considered the god of the Jews to be the Demiurge of Gnosticism. Marcion said that this god is our constant evil adversary. He gave us the Old Testament and is responsible for our misery. Christ is not the Messiah of the Old Testament. Instead, Christ came to save us from the God of Wrath, the god of the Jews. Marcion did accept a modified Gnostic view and denied that Jesus came in the flesh – thus there would be no second coming, etc.

According to Marcion, the church really is not a part of world history. Centuries later, in a more orthodox form, J.N. Darby (1800-1882) and the dispensationalists who followed his teaching also considered the church to be a sort of parenthesis – not really a part of God's true plan (the Church is Plan B). Marcion based his views on some of Paul's writings, but he gave them his particular twist.

Some accused Marcion of taking the position of rejecting the Old Testament and any law because of his immoral behaviour. That view is open to question.³⁸

If that were his motivation, he was followed in the same action by Henry VIII, who separated the Church of England from Roman Catholicism, when Pope Leo X refused to annul his marriage. The origin of their denomination still causes some Anglicans a bit of embarrassment.

A teacher or a movement follows in the steps of Marcion when his doctrine is built around a particular truth, to the exclusion of other truth. Luther, recovering from the excruciation experience of trying to find peace through Roman Catholic works-salvation, came close to Marcion's error when he wrote in his German Bible the word, *allein* ("alone," or "only") in Romans 3:28

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith (here, Luther inserted, *allein*, in his version of the Bible) *apart from works of the Law.*

Luther called James, "a right strawy epistle" and to some degree questioned whether or not it should be in the Bible. He did not, however, amputate the canon, as did Marcion.

We must realize that even though the Christian faith is simpler than the Gnostics made it, it does have complexities, mysteries, and apparent paradoxes and seeming contradictions.

Two consistent sources of heresies are:

- An effort to make everything fit into one simple truth or doctrinal emphasis
- An effort to explain everything

³⁸ Tertullian, one of Marcion's harshest critics, described him as being a "most holy teacher" who imposed "sanctity on the flesh. Tertullian, *On the Prescription of Heretics* 30; idem, *Against Marcion* 1:28

Montanus: A call to be a Spirit-led Church

Montanus was a contemporary of Marcion. He felt that the church was reverting to Judaism, worldliness, and formalism. He sought to call the church back to being a Spirit-led church. He was a forerunner of the Charismatic movement.

Sometime between 155 and 172 AD, Montanus emerged in Phrygia, demanding a higher standard for the Church and separation from the world. He was concerned about the growth of formalism in the Church and the dependence on human leadership, rather than the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He saw the rising prominence of a single bishop in the local church as an expression of this tendency. If he had gone no further than advocating pure living, holiness, and less formalism in the Church, Montanus would have done nothing but good. However, as is too often the case, he went much further.

Montanus believed that the Church was overly reliant on Scripture. Montanus contended that inspiration was immediate and continuous and that he was the Paraclete through whom the Holy Spirit spoke, even as the Holy Spirit had spoken through Paul and the other apostles. When he did refer to Scripture, it was with a fanatical misinterpretation. He and his two prophetess associates, Prisca and Maximilla, went about prophesying in the name of the Holy Spirit. The Montanists prophesied in a state of ecstasy, as though their personalities were suspended while the Holy Spirit spoke through them. Montanus quoted the Holy Spirit as saying, “Behold, man is like a lyre and I fly over it like the plectrum” (Today, we would call a plectrum a “guitar pick”).

Montanus and his two associates declared that any opposition to their new prophecy was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Montanus developed an elaborate eschatology, prophesying the speedy Second Coming of Christ. He taught that the Kingdom of Christ soon would be set up at Pepuza in Phrygia and that he would have a prominent place in that kingdom. In order to be prepared and qualified for this coming kingdom, Montanus and his followers practiced strict asceticism (much fasting, eating only dry foods, and no remarriage for widows or widowers, etc.). His doctrine of a new age of the Spirit suggested that the Christian period, centering on Jesus, had ended. He claimed the right to push Christ and the apostolic message into the background. In the name of the Holy Spirit, Montanus denied that God's decisive and normative revelation had occurred in Jesus Christ. The movement was strongest around Carthage and the eastern lands. Montanism was regarded as heresy in most churches. Finally, in 381, the Council at Constantinople officially declared that Montanists were pagans.

Montanism finds its heirs in Roman Catholicism's various dogmas that have been pronounced over the years – revelation that has gone beyond, and in some cases, contrary to Scripture.

Montanism finds its heirs in any ministry that sets prophetic dates – which always seem to have to be revised because they fail.

Montanism finds its heirs in any sort of prophetic ministry that considers its prophecies equal to or as authoritative as Scripture.

Once again, Mormonism, Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses and many groups that cannot be labeled “Christian,” reflect Montanism's attitude toward revelation.

Adoptionism: An effort to explain the Incarnation

A movement called, *Monarchianism*, an attempt to understand Christ correctly, arose early on in the Church. Monarchianism refers to movements that sought to express the fundamental truth that God is one and that He is the sole monarch of the universe. Monarchianism took two forms. The earliest form was *Adoptionism*.

Adoptionism, as a distinct heresy, made its appearance around 190 in Rome. It was a reaction against the Gnostic speculation that made Christ an immaterial *aeon*.

The heresy began with the teaching of a man known as Theodotus the Tanner. Theodotus was a Christian in Byzantium, who renounced Christianity while still in the East. He later moved to Rome and began to declare that Jesus was only *psilos anthropos* (ψίλος ἄνθρωπος), a “mere man,” who received the Spirit of God at his immersion. Although Theodotus professed the *Rule of Faith*, Victor, the bishop of Rome (reigned 189-98) excommunicated him because of his adoptionistic teaching. He was the first person to be branded an heretic while professing the *Rule of Faith*.

Theodotus the Tanner’s doctrine was taken up by a man named Aesclypedotus and a second Theodotus, called, Theodotus the Money-Changer.

The Adoptionists were analytical Aristotelians – cool intellectuals. They used grammatical exegesis, displayed an interest in logic, mathematics, and empirical sciences.

The rise of Adoptionism suggests that neither the *Rule of Faith* (later formulated as the Apostles Creed) nor the words of the New Testament themselves are explicit enough to form an adequate barrier against thinking of Jesus as a supernaturally endowed mere human (although there are significant scriptural hurdles that one must overcome in order to hold such a view). Explicit formulations, such as the creeds of Nicea (325) and Chalcedon (451) were produced to defend the common and traditional understanding of the identity (deity) of Christ.

The initial move of the Adoptionists did not have much effect on the church, because those who held these views did not make good martyrs. Their rationalistic, human, early Unitarian views were not strong enough to keep them steady in the fires of persecution. Christians looked to an eternal life in which they would be like Christ (I John 3:2). The Adoptionists did not present a satisfying view of what that state might be..

One version of Adoptionism declared that God cannot suffer. Therefore, since God could not have suffered on the cross, Jesus was not divine.

Adoptionists were banned from the churches. Churches began to recite mottos describing Christ, such as, “True God and true man.” These mottos on the lips of the common Christians quickly drove the Adoptionists from the stage. Clearly, the early church did not hold to Adoptionism.

Again, this heresy was the result of trying to explain the inexplicable.

Adoptionism has its heirs in certain schools of modern liberal theology. It is common teaching in some Unitarian/Universalist Churches.

It also has heirs many of the Faith Formula teachers who declare that the man, Jesus, received the Holy Spirit at His baptism, then the Holy Spirit left Him to die on the cross, as a man.

Modalism: An effort to preserve the oneness of God

The second form of Monarchianism is known as Modalism.

- Adoptionism tried to preserve the oneness of God by abandoning the deity of Christ
- Modalism sought the same thing by denying the personhood of Christ and the deity of the Holy Spirit
- Modalism states that God is one person, but He manifests Himself in three ways.

Modalists have illustrated their belief by referring to a pot of water. One can take a pot of water, which is liquid, and put it over the fire and it becomes steam. One can freeze it and it becomes ice. So, the pail of water may be liquid, steam, or ice, but it still is the same pail of water. This does not fit the biblical view of the Godhead.

It would be more appropriate if one had three pails of water, one frozen, one liquid, and one steam. There would be three distinct pails, but all sharing the same elements and essence. However, even this illustration is off the mark because it could result in tri-theism (highlighting the difficulty in finding any analogy for God).

Modalism is a denial of the Trinity. How do we know that the non-biblical word, *Trinity*, accurately describes God? Many statements in Scripture require us to view the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit as three distinct persons.

- The concept of distinct persons in the Godhead is expressed in statements made by Jesus to His disciples in the hours before His arrest.

John 14:16 "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;

John 15:16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.

John 15:26 "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me,

John 17:1 These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee,

John 17:13 "But now I come to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy made full in themselves.

NOTE: If Modalism were true, then Jesus was a great play-actor (a hypocrite and deceiver).

- Acts contains several statements that affirm a Trinitarian view of the Godhead. For example, note the language of Peter's sermon on Pentecost.

Acts 2:33 "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

- The concept of distinct persons in the Godhead is expressed in Paul's traditional greeting to the various churches.

1 Corinthians 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort;

- John assumed the distinctives between the Person of the Father and the Person of the Son.

1 John 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

- The marvelous prologue to Hebrews requires us to reject Modalism.

Hebrews 1:1-3 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Modalism had various expressions. Two of the best known are Neoplatonism and Sabellianism.

- Neoplatonism asserts that there is One God, but three emanations – like the rays of the Sun. The emanations are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One never sees or experiences the real God, but only the emanations.

This is an expression of Plato's view of knowledge, as taught in his myth of the cave.³⁹

³⁹ Influenced by Socrates, Plato was convinced that knowledge is attainable. He was also convinced of two essential characteristics of knowledge. First, knowledge must be certain and infallible. Second, knowledge must have as its object that which is genuinely real as contrasted with that which is an appearance only. Because that which is fully real must, for Plato, be fixed, permanent, and unchanging, he identified the real with the ideal realm of being, as opposed to the physical world of becoming. One consequence of this view was Plato's rejection of empiricism, the claim that knowledge is derived from sense experience. He thought that propositions derived from sense experience have, at most, a degree of probability. They are not certain. Furthermore, the objects of sense experience are changeable phenomena of the physical world. Hence, objects of sense experience are not proper objects of knowledge.

The myth of the cave describes individuals chained deep within the recesses of a cave. Bound so that vision is restricted, they cannot see one another. The only thing visible is the wall of the cave upon which appear shadows cast by models or statues of animals and objects that are passed before a brightly burning fire located outside of the cave, behind these individuals. Breaking free, one of them escapes from the cave into the light of day. With the aid of the sun, that person sees for the first time the real world and returns to the cave with the message that the only things they have seen heretofore are shadows and appearances and that the real world awaits them if they are willing to struggle free of their bonds. The shadowy environment of the cave symbolizes for Plato the physical world of appearances. Escape into the sun-filled setting outside the cave symbolizes the transition to the real world, the world of full and perfect being, the world of Forms, which is the proper object of knowledge.⁴⁰

Thus, as in Plato's cave, Neoplatonism states that all that man can experience of God are God's emanations (equivalent to the shadows on the wall of the cave in the *Myth of the Cave*), which are not reality, but only appearances.

- Another form of Modalism was propounded by Praxis, around 190 AD and Sabellius, a few short years later. Modalistic theology often is known as *Sabellianism*.

Praxis and Sabellius focused on those passages in John in which Jesus stated that He and the Father are one.

John 10:30 *"I and the Father are one."*

The Greek word translated, *one*, is, *hen* (ἓν), which is neuter gender. Both the word for father, *pater* (πατήρ), and the word for son, *huios* (υἱός), are masculine. If Jesus meant that He and the Father were the same person, we would expect the Greek word for *one* to be in the masculine, *eis* (εἷς), agreeing in gender with the nouns it describes. Since the Greek word, *hen*, is neuter, we would understand this verse to say that the Father and Son are of the same divine essence and united in purpose, not that they are the same person.

John 14:9 *Jesus *said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

This verse, of course, means that Jesus and the Father are both deity and are in unity. Clearly Jesus was not stating that He and the Father are the same person because often in the passage (John Chapters 13-16) He uses language that speaks of the Father and Son as separate persons (already noted above).

Today, modalism has its heirs in several groups, the best known being the Oneness Pentecostal Movement. Some churches in other Pentecostal traditions are modalist, stating that Jesus is the

⁴⁰ Robert M. Baird, "Plato," Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia, 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation.

Father and the Holy Spirit. There has been a lot of controversy over T.D. Jakes' inability to state clearly that he is Trinitarian. Of course, the classic Unitarian churches are modalistic (Modalism was the concept that brought them into being). William Branham, whom Pentecostal historians credit with bringing the "healing message" into prominence in the modern Pentecostalism, was modalist, teaching that Jesus was the Father and the Son, although he avoided the terms, "Oneness," and "Jesus Only."

Of special contemporary interest is the teaching of Kenneth Copeland and other Word of Faith teachers who declare that God has a body. Copeland has stated that God's body is not more than Six feet three inches tall, etc. It seems that the Son and Spirit existed eternally, but only as aspects, or forms of manifestation of God. If God has a body, then that would require a modalistic view. The only well known teacher to refer to God's having more than one body is Benny Hinn, who has stated that all three – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have bodies, resulting in a tritheistic view.⁴¹

Arianism: A middle position

Emperor Diocletian was a determined enemy of Christianity. In 303 A.D., he gave an edict designed to destroy this faith. Christians were forbidden to meet, they were to give up all copies of the Scriptures, which, in turn, were to be burned by local authorities. Everyone was ordered to a sacrifice to Roman Gods, including the Emperor. Those who made these oblations were given a *libellus* which was a certificate indicating that they had made the appropriate sacrifice. .

- Some Christians renounced their faith, offered the required oblation, and received a *libellus*.
- Some, Christians were not willing to offer an oblation, but neither did they have the courage or faith to face the Roman torture. These bribed local officials to give them a *libellus*.
- Both of these groups, having failed in their loyalty to Christ, were called *lapsi*.
- Those who gave up Scriptures to be burned were a special class of *lapsi*, they were called, *traditores*.
- Those who stood firm in their faith were called, *confessors*.

After the persecution had lifted many *lapsi* and *traditores* repented of their failure and sought readmission to Christian fellowship. There were some who were in favor of extending forgiveness and grace. Others, called *rigorists*, strongly opposed readmitting the *lapsi* and the *traditores*. Arius, a young monk in Egypt, was associated with the rigorists. He was not given to compromise.

Arius had been a student of Lucian in Antioch, before becoming an Egyptian monk. Lucian and Arius were influenced by the Adoptionists, but they took a more intermediate view. The Adoptionists taught that Jesus was a mere man, supernaturally endowed with the Holy Spirit. Lucian and Arius taught that only the Father is fully and truly God; the Logos was a created spiritual being, intermediate between God and man.

⁴¹ TBN broadcast, October 13, 1990, as quoted in Robert M. Bowman Jr. *The Word-Faith Controversy* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2001) Page 120

Arius contended that “begotten” is a synonym for “created.” Thus, to Arius the Son is a semi-divine being, not begotten, but created by the Father, before the creation of the material world. The Logos took upon Himself a human body, but not a human soul. Thus, the Logos was neither fully God nor fully man.

In response to Arius’ propagating these views, the Bishop of Alexandria, excommunicated Arius in 321 AD. Arius had politically powerful friends and he began a vigorous campaign of letter writing and stirred up a major controversy in the church. Constantine, who recently had become the sole Roman Emperor, discovered that the Church which he had adopted was in disarray, chiefly because of the controversy over Arianism. Constantine wrote to Alexander and Arius, pleading, “Give me back my quiet days and carefree nights. Do not let me spend the rest of my days joylessly.” Alexander and Arius were unmoved by Constantine’s letter and so Constantine summoned church leaders from throughout his empire to come together to work out the problem. This was the first Council of Nicea (near the newly established capital at Constantinople), held in 325, attended by 318 bishops, mostly from the East. It was a very intense meeting. The Arians entered the meeting quite confident that they would win. Because of poor planning, they were defeated.

Following the council Arius quickly got busy, displaying the same spirit that he had displayed as a rigorist. He pulled out all of the stops, using every political trick that he had up his sleeve. Arius even sought the political help of pagans and Jews. Through his political astuteness, he and his followers gained the upper hand.

Constantine had appointed Athanasius as Alexander’s successor in Alexandria. As the political tide turned in favor of Arius, Athanasius increasingly found himself isolated. In 335 AD, Constantine gave in to political pressure and deposed Athanasius. Athanasius was exiled to Trier in 336 AD. At one time, the only influential voice for the orthodox understanding of Christ was Athanasius who seemingly stood alone against the world. The next several decades (340 – 380 AD) are an embarrassing record of church intrigue and social unrest.

Two forms of Arianism developed: semi-Arians and radical-Arians. The Orthodox view is that the Son is of the same essence and substance as the Father. This is the *homoousios* view – meaning, “same.” The semi-Arians said that the Son was *homoiousios*, meaning similar. This may seem trivial, but it is not. If Jesus is of the same substance as the Father, then He is truly God and it is reasonable to believe that He can save us to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25). On the other hand, if He is only similar, then it is not evident that he possesses the divine power and authority needed to make atonement on behalf of the human race.

If the fleshly body is just a human body, possessed by the Logos, how could the sacrifice of that body, devoid of a soul, make atonement?⁴²

⁴² Although not originating from exactly the same concept, teachers such as Charles Capps, Kenneth Copeland, and Kenneth Hagin, face the same question, as a result of their Christology. They resolve the problem by teaching that Christ suffered and died in hell, then was born again in hell and resurrected. By undergoing spiritual death and resurrection, Jesus defeated Satan on his own soil and thus achieved for us the victory. The scriptural problems with this teaching are many, and should be quite obvious.

Radical Arians went beyond this, declaring that the Son was “unlike” the Father. They admitted that the Son could perfectly know the Father, but so could any other human being.

Over time the Arians lost support and the *homoousia* (the Son is of the same substance as the Father) came to be the orthodox statement.

The term, Trinity, is not found in Scripture. Yet, all of the basic scriptural statements and convictions about the work of Christ, presuppose that He is a distinct person from the Father, and yet must also be deity in order to accomplish the task of reconciliation and redemption. The same arguments could be made concerning the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, a fully human redeemer, not one just dressed up like a man, is required for our redemption.

1 Timothy 2:5 *For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,*

Christ is fully God and fully man, otherwise the atonement could not have taken place. The Bible presents two themes running parallel to one another: the eternal, pre-existent Son and the historic, individual man.

Whenever the deity or the humanity is considered in isolation and its implications are systematically developed, a one-sided presentation results, resulting in some sort of heresy.

The New England Unitarians in the early 1800’s, expressed a theology almost identical to the Arians.

The Arian statement that the Son and Christians have the same access to the Father, etc., is a preview of the Word of Faith teachers who state that Christians are incarnations, just like Jesus.⁴³ Kenyon’s statement, plagiarized by Kenneth Hagin declares,

Every man who has been born again is an incarnation and Christianity is a miracle. The believer is as much an incarnation as was Jesus of Nazareth.⁴⁴

Here’s a quote from Kenneth Copeland:

The Spirit of God spoke to me and He said, “Son, realize this” – now follow me in this; don’t let your traditions trip you up. He said, “Think this way: A twice-born man whipped Satan in his own domain” And I threw my Bible like that [laughs]; I said, “What?” He said, “A born-again man defeated Satan, the firstborn of many brethren defeated him.” He said, “You are the very image and the very copy of that one.” I said, “Goodness gracious, sakes’ alive,” and it just

⁴³ For an excellent treatment of the Word of Faith theology, see Robert W. Bowman Jr, *The Word of Faith Controversy* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2001). Some of the statements in this paper are the result of documentation provided by Bowman.

⁴⁴ Kenneth Hagin, “The Incarnation”, *The Word of Faith* (December 1980): 14; E.W.Kenyon, *The Father and His Family: The Story of Man’s Redemption*. (Lynwood, Washington, Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, 1964) pg 118

began – I began to see what had gone on in there [hell]. And I said, “Well now you don’t mean, you couldn’t dare mean that I could have done the same thing?” He said, “Oh, yeah, if you’d known that, had knowledge of the Word of God that He did you could have done the same thing. ‘Cause you’re a reborn man too.”⁴⁵

PART FOUR **CREEDS**

After the Reformation, denominations began to produce creeds that expressed their distinctives. By the time the United States had become a nation, almost every denomination and sect within each denomination had a creed. Denominations required their constituents to be loyal to their creed. These denominationally inspired creeds produced terrible division in the Christian community.

Most of those who have come to Christ through contemporary moves of the Spirit have had little exposure to creeds. If they have any sort of attitude toward the creeds is it one of contempt because sectarian creeds have erected walls between believers. Unknowingly, most recent movements have reflected the attitude of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, who came to America around 1800. These two men, father and son, were leaders of the Anti-burgher Seceder Presbyterian Church. Observe that the first division from other Christians was Presbyterian. The second was Seceder, dividing off from other Presbyterians. Then there were the Burghers, who divided off from the rest of the Seceders. Then there were the Anti-burghers who separated from the Burghers. The Campbells being grieved by the divisions among God’s people, began preaching the motto, “No creed but Christ; no book but the Bible; no name but the Divine.” The movement that they began was one of the most successful efforts to restore the New Testament Church in faith and practice.

Many denominational creeds are based upon interpretation of Scripture, rather than forthright statements of Scripture. For example, some creeds produced in the 20th Century involve eschatology. The doctrine of Pretribulation Rapturism began with John Darby and the Plymouth Brethren in 1830. It made its way to the US in the 1880’s and was popularized by the *Scofield Reference Bible* of 1909 and the revision of 1917. Some Fundamentalist and Pentecostal denominations produced creeds that include *Scofield Reference Bible* pretribulation eschatology. Resting on the interpretation of vague passages in Daniel and The Revelation, these creeds became the occasion for harsh words against those who disagreed.

The Origin Of Creeds

Ineffable is a word that belongs in the vocabulary of every thinking Christian. The term refers to something that is too sacred to utter, or something that it is impossible to express in words. The foundation and heart of a Christian’s faith clearly is, *ineffable*.

The Jews considered God’s personal name to be too sacred to pronounce. Thus, it was (is) ineffable. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the personal Name by which God revealed Himself is hwhy

⁴⁵ Kenneth Copeland, “Substitution and Identification” *What Happened from the Cross to the Throne* Tape #020017 (Forth Worth: Kenneth Copeland Minsitries, 1990) Quoted in Bowman, *The Word Faith Controversy*, pgs 153, 183.

(the letters, right to left, *yod, heth, waw, heth*). These four Hebrew consonants, known as the *Tetragrammaton*, have no vowels attached to them in the original Hebrew text, thus we do not know for certain how to pronounce God's personal Name. No Jew ever spoke that Name, because he feared that doing so might be committing blasphemy. Instead, when encountering the Tetragrammaton, the Jew would say, *adonai*, the word for Lord. Note that most of our English Bibles have followed this practice. When THE LORD (all capitol letters) occurs in most versions of the English Bible, that means that in the Hebrew text, the word is hwhy, God's personal name. Sometime in the Fifth or Sixth Century AD, when the Hebrew language was dying out, the Massorites invented vowel points in order to preserve the correct pronunciation,⁴⁶ Note that they considered the text to be so sacred that they did not insert vowels between the consonants, as do most written languages, but vowel points were inserted above or below the consonants. Because the Tetragrammaton never had been pronounced, no one knew for certain how to pronounce it. The problem was resolved by attaching to the ineffable Divine Name the vowels from *adonai* or the vowels from the generic Hebrew word for God, *elohim*, resulting in *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah*. Thus, the vowel pointed personal name for God in modern Hebrew is יהוה

The second meaning of *ineffable*, "something so profound that language cannot communicate it," is at the heart of much of the controversy over Christian doctrine. How can one describe God? What language can reduce the Trinity to human understanding? How can we explain the Divinity and humanity of Jesus? What language can be found to express the seeming contradiction between man's free will and God's absolute sovereignty? Such things as these are ineffable.

Efforts to define the ineffable, followed by making these definitions dogma, have resulted in division, controversy, and sometimes martyrdom. That being true, why would anyone want to risk producing the bitter fruit of such an exercise? The answer is simple. When various individuals began to describe incorrectly, God and things related to God – thus presenting a different God, a different Jesus, and a different Gospel – the early Church found it necessary to declare and define truth to the degree that it was possible. The result of this task was the production of the early creeds.

The councils that produced the creeds were not formulating doctrine. What they did was to put into succinct writing the beliefs held by the Church at large – the traditional and historic faith that was believed by all believers everywhere (the exception being contemporary dissenters and followers of heretical teachers). Furthermore, Bible study and Bible reading were done communally, not just individually, as we tend to read and study today. There were two reasons for this:

- As already noted, copies of the Scriptures were not readily available to every Christian
- The sense of community was expressed in exegeting Scripture as a part of the community of faith. For example, a teacher in one place felt that he was a colleague of a teacher in another place. There was a trans-local sense of community, which attempted to maintain a consensus concerning faith's basic truths.

⁴⁶ Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, E. Kautzsch editor, translated by A. E. Crowley, Second English Edition, (London, Oxford University Press, 1910) pg 38, paragraph 3.

Thus, as Christopher A. Hall has written,

“the Council of Nicea in 325 was actually the fruit of an extended exercise in community Bible reading. The early Fathers found the Trinity everywhere in Scripture, but not by that name. They also shaped for posterity the doctrines that made the best sense out of the whole canon – not just a few verses.”⁴⁷

Because they reflect some of the earliest thinking on important biblical doctrines, I believe that we should respect the creeds produced by the early councils. **However, the creeds do not carry the authority of Scripture. They are the product of godly men who were trying to protect theological truth. The creeds do inform us of the doctrinal consensus of the Church in its early years.**

The Most Influential Creeds

The historic creeds reveal the commonly held doctrinal understanding of the historic Church. Also, they reflect the particular heresies that were troubling the churches at the time that they were composed. The creeds to which most Christians would look to define the faith without question are three (we also will look at the Athanasian creed).

- The Apostles Creed, originally known as *The Roman Rule of Faith*, (which was used as a confession of faith by candidates for immersion) defines Jesus as God’s only son, born of a virgin. (c125)
- The Nicene Creed attempts to explain the Son by declaring that the Son is of one substance with the Father (325)
- Chalcedon defines the human side of the Son, stating that in His humanity he is of one substance with us, and in all things like us, except sin. (451)

EACH CREED ADDRESSED PARTICULAR HERESIES:

- The Apostles Creed outlawed adoption, by calling Jesus, “only begotten”
- The Nicene Creed condemns all who say that the Father ever existed alone.
- Chalcedon tells us that Jesus Christ is every bit as human as we are and tells us to believe it, confess it, but stop trying to explain it or understand it.

⁴⁷ Christopher A. Hall, “The Habits of Highly Effective Bible Readers,” *Christian History*, XXII, No. 4, pg 11

THE APOSTLES CREED

Early Second Century

TRADITIONAL ENGLISH VERSION

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
 Maker of heaven and earth,
 And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;
 who was conceived by the
 Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, dead, and buried;
 he descended into hell;
 the third day he rose again from the dead;
 he ascended into heaven,
 and sitteth on the right hand of God the
 Father Almighty;
 from thence he shall come to judge the quick
 and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost;
 the holy catholic Church;
 the communion of saints;
 the forgiveness of sins;
 the resurrection of the body;
 and the life everlasting. AMEN.

MODERN ENGLISH VERSION

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
 creator of heaven and earth.
 I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son,
 our Lord,
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
 born of the Virgin Mary,
 suffered under Potius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried;
 he descended to the dead.
 On the third day he rose again;
 he ascended into heaven,
 he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
 and he will come again to judge the living
 and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the holy catholic church,
 the communion of saints,
 the forgiveness of sins,
 the resurrection of the body,
 and the life everlasting. AMEN.

THE NICENE CREED

325 A.D.

ENGLISH VERSION 1549 (WITH A FEW MINOR UPDATES)

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

MODERN ENGLISH VERSION (The Interdenominational Committee on Liturgical Texts)

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. AMEN.

DEFINITION OF CHALCEDON

451 A.D.

Following, then, the holy fathers, we unite in teaching all men to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

This selfsame one is perfect both in deity and in humanness; this selfsame one is also actually God and actually man, with a rational soul [i.e., human soul] and a body.

He is of the same reality as God as far as his deity is concerned and of the same reality as we ourselves as far as his humanness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted.

Before time began he was begotten of the Father, in respect of his deity, and now in these “last days,” for us and behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer in respect of his humanness.

We also teach that we apprehend this one and only Christ-Son, Lord, only-begotten — in two natures; and we do this without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the “properties” of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one “person” and in one reality [hypostasis]. They are not divided or cut into two persons, but are together the one and only and only-begotten Word [Logos] of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus have the prophets of old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us; thus the Symbol of Fathers [the Nicene Creed] has handed down to us.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

EARLY FIFTH CENTURY

Whoever wills to be in a state of salvation, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic [apostolic/universal] faith, which except everyone shall have kept whole and undefiled without doubt he will perish eternally.

Now the catholic faith is that we worship One God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is One, the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit; the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated; the father infinite, the Son infinite, and the Holy Spirit infinite; the Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet not three eternal but one eternal, as also not three infinites, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one infinite.

So, likewise, the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty; and yet not three almighties but one almighty. So the Father is God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God; and yet not three Gods but one God. So the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet not three Lords but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be both God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say, there be three Gods or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten but proceeding. So there is one Father not three Fathers, one Son not three Sons, and Holy Spirit not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less, but the whole three Persons are coeternal together and coequal.

So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity is to be worshipped. He therefore who wills to be in a state of salvation, let him think thus of the Trinity. But it is necessary to eternal salvation that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The right faith therefore is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man.

He is God of the substance of the Father begotten before the worlds, and He is man of the substance of His mother born in the world; perfect God, perfect man subsisting of a reasoning soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood. Who although He be God and Man yet He is not two but one Christ; one however not by conversion of the GodHead in the flesh, but by taking of the Manhood in God; one altogether not by confusion of substance but by unity of Person. For as the reasoning soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ.

Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father, from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life eternal, and they who indeed have done evil into eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith, which except a man shall have believed faithfully and firmly he cannot be in a state of salvation.

CONCLUSION

Given the foregoing extensive and broad background, what conclusions can we reach? Here are some that immediately come to mind.

1. **The apostolic model is pro-active.** In their epistles the apostles acknowledged the presence of false teaching, but spent the bulk of their teaching presenting the truth. This model fills people with a correct understanding of essential doctrine so that they will not be susceptible to the seduction of false doctrine. Ephesians 4:11-16 presents the picture of a doctrinally healthy church.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

The flock is not susceptible to being blown about by every wind of doctrine because they have been indoctrinated in the truth. Furthermore, the individual members of the flock will speak correct doctrine to one another and when correcting one another, doctrinally, will do so in love.

This model calls us to be aware of false teaching and, as a prophylactic against heresy, to be diligent in indoctrinating people with the truth.

Outstanding examples of this model are the Gospel of John and the First Epistle of John. Writings from early church leaders who were close to John inform us that he wrote these documents in response to the growing threat of Gnosticism in the Church. Note that Gnosticism is not mentioned by name in either of these documents. However, their entire content is anti-Gnostic. Understanding the focus of these pieces of literature helps us to understand some of the statements that might confuse a modern reader.

2. **There are occasions in which teachers of false doctrine or incomplete doctrine can be instructed in the truth.** The most obvious example of this is the instruction that Priscilla and Aquilla gave to Apollos.

Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the

baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. (Acts 18:24-26)

This is in harmony with Paul's instruction to Timothy.

But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:23-26)

In similar vein, Paul instructed the Thessalonians in how to approach church members who ignored the behaviour standards that he had imparted to the church.

And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15)

Paul's instruction to Titus, concerning how to handle an heretick seems to be the recommended pattern for those who claim to be brothers but who are presenting false, troubling, and divisive teaching, as well as living spiritually irresponsible lives.

But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man (Greek – heretikos) - after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned. (Titus 3:9-11)

If someone, through aberrant or speculative doctrine, is troubling the church over which we have oversight, we owe that person the respect of confrontation as a brother. If we have to confront him two times and he still does not desist, he is to be shunned – marked as an heretick. In Paul's day, such troublesome matters related to the law. In John's later years, the problem was Gnosticism. In our day, there are a multitude of strange and aberrant teachings. Satan does not rest; he produces in each generation seductive doctrinal challenges.

In every generation there are those who are ever learning, yet never coming to a knowledge of the truth. Most liberal theologians fit this description, especially those who are representatives of the growing Post-modern philosophy. In II Timothy 3:1-11, Paul describes such teachers, pointing out that one reason for such aberrant doctrine is the lustful lifestyle that it hides.

This brings us to the question of teaching presented by those who are not a part of our own local church. As was true of the doctrines perpetrated by those exposed in II Timothy 3, many doctrines presented today are popular because they appeal to man's fleshly nature. In former years, it was not too difficult to protect our flocks from such influences. With the advent of radio and television, it no longer is an easy task. Because of this, we must address these matters from our pulpits, and as we have opportunity to do so, we must confront the purveyors of falsehood. In my opinion, we must seek guidance from God concerning these confrontations. There are so many bizarre and ungodly doctrines being popularized today that confronting all of them would be a full time job. There are some ministries that seem to be called to such confrontation, but rarely are they successful in deterring the ongoing presentation of these teachings. Those whom they seek to confront usually react, rather than listen. Pride usually is on the line. These ministries do seem to be effective in warning some listeners.

3. **There are situations in which it is appropriate to name perpetrators.** Paul often named those who were teaching false doctrine. One example is II Timothy 2:15-18. The heresy propagated by Hymenaeus and Philetus was a serious problem, chiefly because it distorted a basic Christian doctrine.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some.

Paul's language is quite clear, this passage. He calls this heresy, "gangrene," something that will spread throughout the body. He recognized that when a false doctrine is put forth, its spread is inevitable. Traditionally, the only way to stop the spread of gangrene is to amputate the infected limb, or to excise the infected flesh. In keeping with this image, naming perpetrators is an important deterrent to the spread of false doctrine. They will be rejected (cut off) by those who look to us for guidance and spiritual authority. Other scriptural statements asserting the same point could be cited.

4. **We must recognize that there is a limit to our knowledge of things related to God, His Kingdom, and eternity.** If God has not chosen to reveal these things to us, clearly, then we must admit we just don't know. Much error has come from efforts to define that which God has not defined. When we begin to make pronouncements in these areas, we are guilty of foolish and ignorant speculations.

But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.
(2 Timothy 2:23)

The Greek word translated, "mystery," is *musterion* (μυστήριον). The Greek term does not mean the same thing as the English word, "mystery." In English, mystery carries the idea of something that isn't known, something beyond

comprehension, or a puzzle to be solved (as in a murder mystery story). The Greek term, however, refers to something that God has revealed and it could only be known by revelation. It never refers to some secret, obscure truth, but to that which every believer should know and believe because God has revealed it and recorded it.

An example is the resurrection.

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:50-53)

The resurrection is something that we could not have deduced or have any certainty about, if God had not revealed it to us. He has so revealed it and thus it is a *musterion*.

Another example is the doctrine of the cross and the atonement. Paul described this basic doctrine as *musterion*.

Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him." 1 Corinthians 2:6-9

The doctrine of the resurrection is characteristic of many *musterions*. Even after it is revealed, we cannot understand it. If I die and my body returns to the soil, then the elements of my body fertilize that soil. In time, grass grows, feeding on the elements in that soil and my body becomes a part of the grass. One afternoon, a cow eats the grass and the elements of my body become a part of the cow. One day, one of my descendants chooses to eat that cow and the elements of my body become a part of his body. In the resurrection, when his body and my body are resurrected... how is that going to work out? The resurrection is true, it has been revealed, it is a *musterion*, but even so, who can explain it!

Paul describes as a mystery, the fact that God is creating “one new man” out of Gentile and Jew – God revealed it and it now is proclaimed (Ephesians 2:11-3:7). The purposes of God concerning Israel Paul described as a “mystery” – it existed only in the mind of God but now has been revealed. Other examples could be given.

Where some theological truth has not been revealed and recorded in Scripture, we must say, “it is unknown (it is not a mystery).” It is something that we can only know by revelation and God did not choose to reveal it. We create havoc when we try to have an answer for everything or when we seek to define precisely things which are beyond our ability to understand or things that cannot be reduced to cognitive language.

- 5. Where do we draw the line?** How much tolerance should be allowed in matters of doctrine? Are some deviations so severe that they must be confronted and others of such a nature that they can be tolerated, even ignored? In today’s culture, this is a challenging question.

In I Corinthians 1:10, Paul urges the members of the church to be so united in belief that they even have the same opinion.

*Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.*⁴⁸

However, that seems to be an ideal, not a requirement for fellowship. We already have noted that in Ephesians 4 Paul declares “the unity of the faith” to be a goal, not a realized condition.

It seems to me that this has to be a personal decision. For a local church, the decision must be made by the elders.

Some situations call for forceful action. When Jesus saw the manner in which God’s House of Prayer had been turned into an instrument for personal profit and religious abuse, He was filled with anger. He reacted violently. Today, when the Church and the Gospel have become instruments for popular speakers to obtain personal gain, any lover of God must be incensed. The manner in which some Word of Faith teachers use their doctrine to manipulate people into giving their money, so that the preacher can live in prosperity, or so that he can achieve some agenda, makes my blood boil.⁴⁹ What are we to do? There is no Temple – no opportunity to do what Jesus did. We must, however, speak out against this abuse and make certain that our people are warned.

Where possible, we need to have a good balance between grace and truth.

John described Jesus as being *full of grace and truth* (John 1:14).

⁴⁸ The term translated, “judgment” in the NAS is the Greek term, γνώμη, which implies thinking about something and reaching a conclusion. Thus, it can be rendered, “judgment,” or “opinion.”

⁴⁹ Not all Word of Faith teachers are guilty of such abuse, even though their doctrine is heretical.

When possible, our stand for truth should be in an atmosphere of grace. Truth should be spoken in love. The following passages (some have been quoted earlier) urge grace.

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 *And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

1 Thessalonians 2:7, 10-12 *But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.... You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

2 Timothy 2:24-26 *And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*

Titus 3:1-3 *Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.*

James 3:17 *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.*

Colossians 4:6 *Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.*

Ephesians 4:1-3 *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Ephesians 4:14-15 *As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ,*

We must be concerned with the Truth, which is Christ, and the truth, which is the teaching of the Apostles and Scripture. We need to know when to make an issue of something and when to leave it alone. When we are called to make an issue of something, we need to do it in a manner that glorifies Christ and His Church. Sometimes Christ is glorified by forceful action. At other times, He is glorified by an irenic spirit.

ADDENDA A

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CANON

Not long after the close of the New Testament age, it is apparent that the writings of the Apostles were being read in the Sunday services, along with the Old Testament. For example, Justin Martyr, writing around 140 A.D., describes the typical Sunday service. He states that the “memoirs of the Apostles,” were read along with the “writings of the prophets,” before the church participated in weekly communion.⁵⁰ The memoirs were the Four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The available evidence would indicate that Paul’s letters were first gathered into a single collection, next were collected the Four Gospels, then the other New Testament documents. When a church received a letter from Paul, it often made a copy that was circulated to surrounding churches. Note that Paul gave the Colossians instructions to send a copy of his Colossian letter to Laodicea and that the Laodiceans would send them a copy of the one that he wrote to Laodicea (Colossians 4:16). Some of Paul’s letters were not written to a particular city, but to the churches of a geographical area (Galatians, for example), so they would have been distributed throughout the region.

Somewhat complete lists of the New Testament Scriptures did not appear until the last half of the Second Century. One of the earliest is “The Muratorian Fragment” (also called, “The Muratorian Canon), so called because it was discovered by L.A. Muratori in 1740. Scholars are universally agreed that this list from the late Second Century. The list is mutilated at the first and possibly at the end, so it is not complete. The list begins with Mark, followed by Luke and John. However, it designates Luke as the third Gospel and John as the Fourth. The mention of Matthew obviously was in the mutilated section, since the list speaks of four Gospels and lists three in the same order as we have them in our Bibles. The Muratorian Fragment explains why certain documents are included and some are not. After the Gospels, follow Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, Jude, two letters of John, and Revelation. The only books of our New Testament not found in the list are Hebrews, James, I & 2 Peter, and possibly 3 John. The way that the list is composed, it is possible that 3 John is included in the two letters of John, already noted. Even with these omissions, the Muratorian Fragment provides a list very close to our New Testament. The fragment does include as Scripture one book that we do not have in our Bibles, The Wisdom of Solomon. It includes The Apocalypse of Peter in its list, but notes that “some of our people” do not accept it as being authentic Scripture. The list also mentions other writings, some of which are acceptable for private reading, but not to be read in the worship service because they are not Scripture. Others are approved for reading, but not while reading Scripture. Some are listed as being popular among Christians, but they are to be outright rejected because of dubious origin.

⁵⁰ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Section 66 and 67; see also James Garrett, *The Meeting*, 1999 Conclave paper, page 27

Two lists composed by Origin (ca 185-254) are extant. Origin is reputed to have composed 6000 scrolls on biblical themes. In one of these he lists all of the books that we have in our New Testament, but expresses hesitation about some. He quotes from Hebrews several times, but says that some churches do not accept it. He says that Second Peter is possibly from Peter but that some dispute this. He says that John may have composed a second and third epistle, but that not everyone considers them genuine. In another of his works, *Homilies on Joshua*, Origin lists the same twenty-seven books that we have in our New Testament.

The list included in an Easter letter from Athanasius of Alexandria, written in 367 A.D., is identical to the twenty-seven books that we acknowledge today.

It is important for us to remember that these lists, prior to that of Athanasius, were not authoritative lists, setting down a precept for the churches. They were lists that recorded the general consensus of the churches in the area where the author lived.

ADDENDA B

PARALLEL USES OF γΝΩΣΙΣ and ΕΠΙΓΝΩΣΙΣ (γινώσκω and ἐπιγινώσκω are the verb forms of these terms)

In the following passages, for the benefit of non-Greek readers, we identify

- γνῶσις as (A)
- ἐπίγνωσις as (B)

NAS Matthew 7:16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they?"

GNT Matthew 7:16 ἀπὸ τῶν καρπῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιγνώσεσθε (B) αὐτούς. μήτι συλλέγουσιν ἀπὸ ἀκανθῶν σταφυλὰς ἢ ἀπὸ τριβόλων σῦκα;

NAS Matthew 7:20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits."

GNT Matthew 7:20 ἄρα γε ἀπὸ τῶν καρπῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιγνώσεσθε (B) αὐτούς.

NAS Luke 6:44 "For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush."

GNT Luke 6:44 ἕκαστον γὰρ δένδρον ἐκ τοῦ ἰδίου καρποῦ γινώσκεται (A). οὐ γὰρ ἐξ ἀκανθῶν συλλέγουσιν σῦκα οὐδὲ ἐκ βάρου σταφυλὴν τρυγῶσιν.

NAS Matthew 11:27 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

GNT Matthew 11:27 Πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός μου, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐπιγινώσκει (B) τὸν υἱὸν εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ, οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα τις ἐπιγινώσκει (B) εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ ᾧ ἔαν βούληται ὁ υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψαι.

NAS Luke 10:22 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

GNT Luke 10:22 Πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός μου, καὶ οὐδεὶς γινώσκει (A) τίς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ, καὶ τίς ἐστὶν ὁ πατήρ εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ ᾧ ἔαν βούληται ὁ υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψαι.

NAS Luke 24:31 And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.

GNT Luke 24:31 αὐτῶν δὲ διηνοιχθησαν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ ἐπέγνωσαν (B) αὐτόν· καὶ αὐτὸς ἄφαντος ἐγένετο ἀπ' αὐτῶν.

NAS Luke 24:35 And they began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

GNT Luke 24:35 καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐξηγοῦντο τὰ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ καὶ ὡς ἐγνώσθη (A) αὐτοῖς ἐν τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου.

*NAS Mark 2:8 And immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, *said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?"*

GNT Mark 2:8 καὶ εὐθὺς ἐπιγνοὺς (B) ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ ὅτι οὕτως διαλογίζονται ἐν ἑαυτοῖς λέγει αὐτοῖς, Τί ταῦτα διαλογίζεσθε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν;

*NAS Mark 8:17 And Jesus, aware of this, *said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?"*

GNT Mark 8:17 καὶ γνοὺς (A) λέγει αὐτοῖς, Τί διαλογίζεσθε ὅτι ἄρτους οὐκ ἔχετε; οὕπω νοεῖτε οὐδὲ συνίετε; πεπωρωμένην ἔχετε τὴν καρδίαν ὑμῶν;

NAS Mark 5:30 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, " Who touched My garments? "

GNT Mark 5:30 καὶ εὐθὺς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐπιγνοὺς (B) ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὴν ἐξ αὐτοῦ δύναμιν ἐξεληθοῦσαν ἐπιστραφεὶς ἐν τῷ ὄχλῳ ἔλεγεν, Τίς μου ἥψατο τῶν ἱματίων;

NAS Luke 8:46 But Jesus said, "Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me."

GNT Luke 8:46 ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν, Ἦψατό μου τις, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἔγνω (A) δύναμιν ἐξεληλυθυῖαν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ.

NAS Mark 6:33 And the people saw them going, and many recognized them, and they ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them.

GNT Mark 6:33 καὶ εἶδον αὐτοὺς ὑπάγοντας καὶ ἐπέγνωσαν (B) πολλοὶ καὶ πεζῆ ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν πόλεων συνέδραμον ἐκεῖ καὶ προῆλθον αὐτούς.

NAS Mark 6:54 And when they had come out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him,

GNT Mark 6:54 καὶ ἐξελθόντων αὐτῶν ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου εὐθὺς ἐπιγνόντες (B) αὐτόν

NAS Luke 9:11 But the multitudes were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing.

GNT Luke 9:11 οἱ δὲ ὄχλοι **γνόντες (A)** ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ· καὶ ἀποδεξάμενος αὐτοὺς ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ τοὺς χρείαν ἔχοντας θεραπείας ἴατο.

NAS Colossians 1:6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth;

GNT Colossians 1:6 τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς, καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε καὶ **ἐπέγνωτε (B)** τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ·

^{NAS} **2 Corinthians 8:9** *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.*

^{BNT} **2 Corinthians 8:9** **γινώσκετε (A)** γὰρ τὴν χάριν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι δι' ὑμᾶς ἐπτώχευσεν πλούσιος ὢν, ἵνα ὑμεῖς τῇ ἐκείνου πτωχείᾳ πλουτήσητε.