

Contending For The Faith  
Feb. 26, 2020 Lesson # 7 Battle For The Deity Of Jesus Christ

Warning: Heresy and error will rise up in the church when Christians stray from the pure teachings found in God's Word.

There are two main types of Apostasy.

1. A falling away from key and true doctrines of the Bible into heretical teachings that claim to be "the real" Christian doctrine,
2. A complete renunciation of the Christian faith, which results in a full abandonment of Christ.

The first form of apostasy starts with a denial of key Christian truths such as the divinity of Christ. This begins a downhill slide into a full departure from the faith.

Type 2 almost always begins with type 1.

A heretical belief becomes a heretical teaching that splinters and grows until it pollutes all aspects of a person's faith. Satan's end goal is accomplished, which is a complete falling away from The Faith that was once delivered to the saints.

After urging his readers to contend earnestly for the faith, Jude highlights the reason:

Jude 1:4 "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."

II Pet. 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

Jude: 2 Basic False Teachings For Which We Are To Be Aware Of & To Contend For

- Certain men would bring about in the church a departure, an apostasy, in two directions
  - A Denial Of Jesus Christ and Blatant Immorality

*Beware Of False Teachers : Damnable Heresies & Destructive Doctrines*

Jude 1:4d turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

II Pet. 2: 1c even denying the Lord that bought them, ...And many shall follow their pernicious ways;

Peter takes us to the root of their destructive heresy when he adds (2:1), "even denying the Lord who bought them."

Question: In what sense were they "bought" by the Lord?

- ❖ Jesus Christ died for the Church. [Eph. 5:25]
- ❖ He also died for the sins of the whole world. [I John 2:2]
- ❖ He is the merchant who purchased the whole field [world] that He might acquire the treasure in it. [Matt. 13:44]

Consider: When it comes to application, the Lord's atonement is limited to those who believe.

When it comes to efficacy, His death is sufficient for the whole world He purchased even those who reject Him and deny Him! This makes their condemnation even greater.

1. They deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - They teach damnable heresies which deny the Person of Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross. This is a matter of life and death!  
Difference between salvation and condemnation
  - They deny He is the promised Messiah.
  - They deny His physical death, resurrection and ascension.
  - They deny the sacrificial atonement which He accomplished at Calvary.
2. They deny His promised return to punish His enemies and reward the righteous.
3. They deny Christ as their Master by seeking to diminish His nature.  
He is not the Son of God. He is a good man, a prophet, etc.
4. They deny the inspiration of the Bible.
5. They deny the sinfulness of man.

Wiersbe: The first test of any religious teacher is: "What do you think of Jesus Christ? Is He God come in the flesh?" Anyone who denies this cardinal doctrine is a false teacher NO MATTER how correct he may be in other matters.

1. Jude calls them on their rejection of the deity of Christ.

The deity of Jesus [believing Jesus is God] is one of the essentials of the Christian faith. The faith entrusted to God's holy people for which they must contend is grounded in Jesus Christ.

At a crucial point in his ministry, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"

Matthew 16:15. Peter: Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Understanding the deity of Jesus is fundamental in contending for the truth of the Christian faith. This belief separates us from nearly every other cult and faith in the world. Nearly every cult or non-Christian faith will readily accept that Jesus existed, believing Jesus was a prophet, an angel, a good man, a good teacher, a very enlightened man, God's son [a created being], etc... However, they will flatly deny Jesus' deity, and consider it heresy to call Jesus God.

In denying His Person,

- they deny His power to deliver from sin's guilt and power. [Matt 28:18; John 8:34-36]
- they deny His right to judge according to His absolute righteousness. [John 5:26-30]

If someone denies that Jesus Christ is Lord, it is a departure from "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" and is considered an apostasy.

All major religions and cultic groups reject the doctrine of deity of Christ. A common objection results from revisionist history, which claims that Christ's deity was invented at the Council of Nicaea in the 4th century and not something believed by the early church.

Arianism - A heresy regarding Deity of Jesus Christ after Constantine recognized the Church in AD 313.

Questions: Was Jesus truly God in the flesh or a created being?

Is Jesus of "like substance" with the Father or of the "same substance" as the Father?

This View: *Jesus was not fully divine* although still related to God as a son to a father.

Root Problem: Arius, a presbyter (priest) from Libya announced, "If the Father begat the Son, then he who was begotten had a beginning in existence, and from this it follows there was a time when the Son was not." He contended that Jesus Christ was a created being. Arius, given his view of God, logically concluded the following 5 things about the relation of God to Jesus:

- a. The Son or the Word of God is not divine but created by God as the first act of creation. Jesus was the crowning glory of all creation.
- b. The Son is not self-existent and cannot be God.
- c. As a creature the Son or the Word must have had a beginning.
- d. The Son can have no communion with, and indeed no direct knowledge of, His Father.
- e. The Son must be liable to change and even sin (*treptos; alloiotes*).

A major misinterpretation in Arianism is the meaning of "firstborn" [Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15-20]

Arians understand "firstborn" to mean:

Jesus was "born" or "created" as the first act of creation.

John 8:58 Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

John 10:30 I and My Father are one."

Jesus Himself proclaimed His self-existence and eternity.

John 1:1-2 tells us that Jesus was "in the beginning with God."

Arius argued that Jesus was not homoousios ("of the same essence") as the Father but was rather homoiousios ("of similar essence").

He Himself was no more than a creature in relation to God, the Father.

The controversy came to be expressed by two Greek words:

*homoousias*: the Son is of the same essence as the Father

*homoiousias*: the Son is of similar essence as the Father

Arius described his position in this manner: "The Father existed before the Son. There was a time when the Son did not exist. Therefore, the Son was created by the Father. Therefore, although the Son was the highest of all creatures, he was not of the essence of God."

The net result of Arius' teaching was to reduce the Word (Jesus) to demigod.

Result: The controversy spread all over the empire. Arius was clever and did his best to get the people on his side, even going so far as to compose little songs that taught his theology, which he tried to teach to everyone who would listen. His winsome nature, asceticism, and revered position as a preacher also contributed to his cause. Christians could be heard singing a catchy tune that championed the Arian view: "There was a time when the Son was not."

In every city, wrote a historian, "bishop was contending against bishop, and the people were contending against one another, like swarms of gnats fighting in the air."

Meet Athanasius, a champion of the faith who rose up to defend the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He fought against Arius, arguing his view denied the Trinity. Christ is not of a like substance to God, but the same substance.

To Athanasius this was not splitting of theological hairs. Salvation was at issue: only one who was fully human could atone for human sin; only one who was fully divine could have the power to save us. To Athanasius, the logic of New Testament doctrine of salvation assumed the dual nature of Christ. If Christ does not share an eternal Godhood with the Father, then our salvation would be impossible for creature cannot redeem creature. "Those who maintain 'There was a time when the Son was not' robbed God of His Word, like plunderers."

Constantine Gets Involved: Word of the dispute made it to the newly converted Emperor Constantine the Great, who was more concerned with seeing church unity than theological truth. "Division in the church," he told the bishops, "is worse than war."

He feared the church dispute would cause disorder within his empire. To settle the matter, Constantine called the Council of Nicea, first general council of the Christian church, in 325 AD. Of the 1800 bishops he invited, about 300 came (all expenses paid).

Constantine's Charge To the Council: Define the nature of God For All Of Christianity and eliminate confusion, controversy, and contention within the church.

The Bishops argued, fought, and eventually wrote out an early version of the Nicene Creed.

Enter: Athanasius attended the Council of Nicea at 27 years of age. His quotes:

"Jesus that I know as my Redeemer cannot be less than God."

"He became what we are, so He might make us what He is."

The Arian view was presented by Eusebius of Nicodemia, who was quite confident that once the Arian view was clearly and logically stated, the Council would overwhelmingly vote for them. He stated how the Son was created out of nothing from the Father and different in nature and essence from the Father. The reaction was not acceptance; it was considered blasphemous. "Eusebius was shouted down ... his speech snatched from his hand, torn to shreds, and trampled underfoot."

Ruling of the Council: (1) The Lord Jesus Christ, as the Scriptures teach, was the same substance as the Father, God of very God.

(2) They affirmed the apostles' teaching regarding the person of Christ > the one true God and the Second Person of the Trinity, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

(3) Arianism was condemned > false doctrine

(4) The council, led by Alexander, condemned Arius as a heretic, exiled him, and made it a capital offense to possess his writings.

Nicene Creed that affirms Christ's divinity: "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father."

Constantine was pleased that peace had been restored to the church.

However, it was short-lived.

- Controversy was widely discussed in the early church from A.D. 318 to 381
- Required 18 councils before it was fully settled > Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 and ended with the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381.
- Since that time, Arianism has never been accepted as a viable doctrine of the Christian faith. However, Arianism has not died. It has continued throughout the centuries in varying forms. The Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons of today hold a very Arian-like position on Christ's nature.

Challenge From: Athanasius - Fought for Deity of Jesus Christ

Athanasius, a renowned Christian theologian, Church Father, the chief defender of Trinitarianism against Arianism, was the 20<sup>th</sup> bishop of Alexandria, and served 45 years ( June 328 - May 373).

"Black Dwarf" (short, dark-skinned Egyptian) was the tag his enemies gave him.

Over 17 years were spent in 5 exiles ordered by 4 different Roman emperors.

There were 6 more incidents when he fled Alexandria to escape people seeking to take his life.

He became known as "Athanasius contra mundum" > Athanasius against the world.

Yet in the end, his theological enemies were "exiled" from the church's teaching, and it is Athanasius's writings that shaped the future of the church. In one letter, Athanasius listed what he believed were the books that should constitute the New Testament.

"In these [27 writings] alone the teaching of godliness is proclaimed," he wrote.

"No one may add to them, and nothing may be taken away from them."

It is Athanasius's list the church eventually adopted, and it is the one we use to this day.

Athanasius, whose treatise On the Incarnation laid the foundation for the orthodox party at Nicaea, was hailed as "the noble champion of Christ." The diminutive bishop (Black Dwarf) was simply pleased that Arianism had been defeated. >>>>> But it hadn't

1. Within a few months, supporters of Arius talked Constantine into ending Arius's exile. With a few private additions, Arius even signed the Nicene Creed.
2. The emperor ordered Athanasius to restore the heretic to fellowship.
3. When Athanasius refused, his enemies spread false charges against him. He was accused of murder, illegal taxation, sorcery, and treason—the last of which led Constantine to exile him to Trier, now a German city.

Constantine died two years later, and Athanasius returned to Alexandria as Archbishop.

1. In his years of absence, Arianism gained the upper hand.
2. Now many church leaders were espousing Arianism and banished him again.
3. Athanasius fled to Pope Julius I in Rome. He returned in 346 AD but would be banished three more times before he came home to stay in 366. By then he was about 70 years old.

Athanasius, who championed the fight for Christ's name would not permit fellowship around the Lord's Table to anyone who was of the Arian persuasion.

He was so strict in this regard the emperor, Theodosius, commanded him to admit these Arians to partake of the bread and the cup.

Athanasius refused the emperor, and Theodosius reproved him sternly for what he saw as insubordination to his emperor, and Theodosius said these words:

'Do you not realize that all the world is against you?'

Athanasius' answer: 'Then I am against the world'.

In 356, while Athanasius was conducting a service with his congregation, 5,000 armed soldiers stormed the church building. Calmly, he began reading Psalm 136 and asked his congregation to respond. When He Read: "O Give Thanks Unto The Lord; For He Is Good," His Congregation Responded: "For His Mercy Endureth Forever."

He went into the desert to spend time with the monks and wrote articles in defense of the great truth that Christ is fully God. He stated Arians were idolaters who worshiped strange gods, no different from the heathen.

In 362, He was recalled to his flock, but was almost immediately driven away by those who were stung by his attacks against them. He left his weeping congregation but comforted them with the words: Be of good cheer; It Is Only A Cloud, Which Will Soon Pass On.

He escaped hired assassins on an imperial ship on the Nile and found refuge once again in the desert. He returned & was driven away again. He spent 4 months in the tomb of his father.

Athanasius died in 373; he never saw the final victory of his lifelong cause.

The church will always be indebted to the good fight he fought in protecting The Christological view of Scripture.

Arius may have died centuries ago, but his spiritual children are still with us to this day in the form of cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses and others who deny Christ's true essence and person. Sadly, until Christ returns and every last spiritual enemy has been removed, tares such as these will be present among the wheat.

Rev. 2:13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: And you hold fast My name and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

At the end of the first century, Pergamum was a thriving city. So why does the book of Revelation call it the dwelling place of Satan? The people of Pergamum were known as the "Temple-keepers of Asia." The city had three temples dedicated to the worship of the Roman emperor, another for the goddess Athena, and the Great Altar of Zeus, the king of the Greek gods.

The city also had a healing center called the Asklepion, built in honor of Asklepios, the Greek serpent-god of healing and medicine.

"If you were a terminal patient, you were not allowed to go into the Asklepion," says Renner.

"These Asklepion priests didn't want anyone hearing that someone had died in the

Asklepion. There was a huge sign just above the official entrance to the Asklepion that said,

'Death is not permitted here.' So the only way you were going to get in to begin with is if they knew you were going to live."

Patients entered through an underground tunnel. Then they drank a sedative and spent the night in the dormitories of the Asklepion, while non-poisonous snakes crawled around them all night. The serpent-god Asklepios would speak to them in their dreams and give them a diagnosis. It was believed that the snakes carried the healing power of Asklepios," and if a snake slithered across you while you were sleeping at night, that was a divine sign that healing power was coming to you." The next morning, the patients told their "dreams" to the priests, who prescribed their treatments.

The people of Pergamum worshipped a myriad of Greek and Roman gods, but when Christianity arrived with the belief in just one god, the city's pagan priests went on the attack and their most famous victim was a man named Antipas.

1. Did Not Deny My Faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

According to church tradition Antipas, a contemporary with the Apostles, lived during the reign of emperor Domitian in 83 AD. He had been made Bishop of the Christian church of Pergamum by the Apostle John during the reign of Nero.

1. Church tradition says Antipas was a physician suspected of secretly propagating Christianity. The Aesculapeans (the medical guild) accused Antipas of disloyalty to Caesar.

2. When he was old, he was caught by the idolaters of Pergamos. The demons, whom they worshipped, appeared to them and told them they could neither live in that place nor accept their sacrifices because Antipas was forcing them out.

His faith got the attention of the priests and demons of Asklepios.

Renner: "He had cast out so many devils the demons had been complaining to pagans, saying, 'You've got to do something about this Antipas'."

3. The pagan priests went to the Roman governor and complained that the prayers of Antipas were driving their spirits out of the city and hindering the worship of their gods.

4. As punishment, the governor ordered Antipas to offer a sacrifice of wine and incense to a statue of the Roman emperor and declare that the emperor was "lord and god." He refused.

Renner: "If you reject the divinity of the emperor, that is the equivalent of rejecting the city of Rome, and believers were killed for this."

5. The governor tried to convince him that older things are much more honorable.

Note: The governor concluded the religions of the Greeks and Romans were more honorable since they were older and grew with the passing of time.

6. Antipas countered the argument using Cain's story as proof.

Even though Cain was older in age than Abel, Abel was accepted by God and not Cain.

7. When the governor and the Greeks heard this answer they burned with anger.

8. Antipas was sentenced to death on the Altar of Zeus. At the top of the altar was a hollow bronze bull, designed for human sacrifice. Antipas was placed inside a red-hot bronze bull and was roasted alive.

9. Even in the midst of the flames, the elderly bishop Antipas died praying for his church. The year was AD 92.

10. A few years later, the Apostle John wrote Revelation, mentioning the death of Antipas in Pergamum.

11. On April 11 the memory of the martyr Antipas, Bishop of Pergamos is still celebrated by the Orthodox Churches around the world. Antipas means "against all" and he stood against all odds for the faith that was once and for all handed down to him by the Apostles.

Side note: Only the foundation remains; the Altar of Zeus is more than 1000 miles away.

Most of that altar still survives today, and surrounding it are some of the world's most famous marble friezes. They depict the *Gigantomachy*, or the battle between the Greek gods and the giants. At the top of the altar was a hollow bronze bull, designed for human sacrifice.

In the 19th century, German engineers dismantled the altar and took it to Berlin. The so-called "Throne of Satan" went on display in the city's Pergamon Museum in 1930, just in time to inspire one of the most brutal dictators the world has ever seen.

Consider: We must denounce all attacks on the deity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and "hold fast His Name." It is important to get Jesus' identity because if we deny the deity of Jesus then we do not have the Father [I John 2:23; cf. John 5:23].

Why is this important? Because Arianism then and Arianism now will destroy the Church and destroy man's hope for a glorious final destiny. If Jesus Christ is no more than a good man, then the bridge from God to Man does not exist. Jesus' death is no more than a martyrdom and his resurrection no more than a symbol. If this is true, then man is still separated from God, his soul cannot be saved and he is forever alienated from his heavenly home.

2. "Held Fast To His Name" [Rev. 2:13]

- Jesus commended Pergamos for "holding fast the name and the faith of the Lord Jesus."
- Lord Jesus: the name of the One who is God's Son and God The Son.
- They were not ashamed of the name of Jesus, the most divisive name in history.

Jesus Christ is co-equal with God.

Col. 2:18; Rev. 22:8-9 Forbids the worship of angels but commands the worship of Jesus.

Col. 2:9; 1:19 Paul tells us "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."

Rom. 10:9-13 Paul declares Jesus as Lord and the One to whom a person must pray for salvation.

Rom. 9:5 "Jesus is God overall"

Titus 2:13 Jesus is our God and Savior

Faith in Jesus' deity is basic to Paul's theology.

John 1:1-5;9 Jesus is the divine, eternal Logos, the agent of creation; source of life and light

John 14:6 the "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"

I John 2:1-2 our advocate with the Father

Rev. 1:5 the Sovereign

Rev. 22:13 The Son of God from the beginning to the end

A false Jesus cannot save you. If we do not get the identity of Jesus right, we will die in our sin

John 8:24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that

I AM he, ye shall die in your sins. [John 11:25-26]