

# **HERESIES AND ERRORS**

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCH DOCTRINE**

*Part of Hope Chapel's Discipling Series.*



*Guard what was committed to your trust,  
avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions  
of what is falsely called knowledge. (1Tim 6:20)*

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In former days the heretic was proud of *not* being a heretic. It was the kingdoms of the world and the police and the judges who were heretics. He was orthodox. He had no pride in having rebelled against them; they had rebelled against him. The armies with their cruel security, the kings with their cold faces, the decorous processes of State, the reasonable processes of law — all these like sheep had gone astray. The man was proud of being orthodox, was proud of being right. If he stood alone in a howling wilderness, he was more than a man; he was a CHURCH. He was the centre of the universe; it was round him that the stars swung. All the tortures torn out of forgotten hells could not make him admit that he was heretical.

The word “heresy” not only means no longer being wrong; it practically means being clear-headed and courageous. The word “orthodoxy” not only no longer means being right; it practically means being wrong. All this can mean one thing, and one thing only. It means people care less for whether they are philosophically right. For obviously a man ought to confess himself crazy before he confesses himself heretical.

It is foolish, generally speaking, for a philosopher to set fire to another philosopher in Smithfield Market <sup>1</sup> because they do not agree in their theory of the universe. That was done very frequently in the last decadence of the Middle Ages, and it failed altogether in its object. But there is one thing that is infinitely more absurd and impractical than burning a man for his philosophy. This is the habit of saying that his philosophy [*i.e., truth*] does not matter, and this is done universally in the twentieth century, in the decadence of the great revolutionary period.

— G.K. Chesterton

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<sup>1</sup> Where “heretical” reformers and Puritans were burned at the stake in England.

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The purpose of this course is to generally familiarize you with heresies in church history. Why? We want you to know what such heresies sound like, so you become sensitized to them. We want you to be able recognize them when you hear them. “Forewarned is forearmed.” We don’t want Satan to deceive you with his subtle lies and deceptions.

***Our first challenge is to define our terms.*** Everyone agrees that heresy opposes orthodoxy. Everyone agrees that heresy is falsehood. Everyone agrees that orthodoxy is truth. Where the debate begins, is over the *definition* of truth, and who has the *authority* to define that truth. Will our authority be the pope, church councils, seminaries, or whatever is most popular at the time? If whoever sells the most books determines church orthodoxy, then we’re all in trouble.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2Tim 4:3-4 <sup>NKJ</sup>)

Our church believes that God’s word is our only authority; that it contains all the truth we need to know about God and His plan of salvation; and that we’re saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. But those truths haven’t always been held by “the church.” The Reformation was a struggle to recover and uphold those truths as “God’s truth,” and not “man’s truth.” Truth is objective and unchanging; it is not subjective and shifting. And yet, church history shows that our understanding of biblical truth varies.

***Our second challenge is to determine the effect of heresy.*** Does heresy (wrong belief) lead to loss of salvation? Does it remove us from the Christian faith, and so separate us from God’s grace, as to eternally damn us? Some say it does. Others say heresy is merely what opposes or contradicts orthodoxy; and orthodoxy is the truth of God as determined by the teachers of the church.

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; (Eph 4:11-13 <sup>NKJ</sup>)

Church orthodoxy is not necessarily a correct understanding of biblical truth, because we’re fallible creatures. And although heresy is cause for church discipline — up to and including *excommunication* — we cannot determine someone’s salvation with certainty. Only God knows His elect. But we *can* determine with certainty whether someone’s beliefs conform to the accepted teachings of the church. If such persons oppose the doctrines of their church, they are called to repent of their rebellion, and to accept them — to submit to the elders of their church (1Tim 6.20; Heb 13.17) — or be put out of the church.

Yet, *which* church are they put out of? In Roman Catholicism, to be put outside their church, is to lose your salvation. That’s because they believe the Church, its clergy and its sacraments, are necessary means of salvation. That is *their* doctrine. However, it is not the doctrine of the *Protestant faith*.

Here’s the reason why orthodoxy is so crucial: we believe, and Scripture teaches, that right *orthodoxy* leads to right *orthopraxis* (sound doctrine leads to sound practice): “*But as for you, communicate the behavior that goes with sound teaching.* (Tit 2:1 <sup>NET</sup>)

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When instead, our *practice* drives our *doctrine*, heresy isn't far behind. Our doctrine must not be used to validate our sin.

In chapter 1, we'll further explore this challenge of defining orthodoxy, so that we can properly identify which beliefs are truly heresies. Church orthodoxy developed over time, to refute false teachings about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Orthodoxy was reactive, not proactive. It went from simple truth, to complex truth. We know that some things in Scripture are clear, while other things are less clear. And then there are profound mysteries that we cannot fully explain. Heresies force the church to develop and clearly articulate its doctrines beyond the basic truths of saving faith. The benefit is that we gain a fuller understanding of God's plan of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

This course briefly traces that development.

## 1. HERESY AND ORTHODOXY

### *Moving Targets*

Jesus warned us, “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many” (Mat 24:4–5). He continued, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Mat 24.24).

The apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to watch out for anyone who came preaching “another Jesus whom we have not preached... or a different gospel which you have not accepted” (2Cor 11:4). Paul explained to the Galatians that the perversion of the true gospel amounts to nothing less than “a different gospel,” and that anyone who preaches or practices such a “gospel” is to “be *accursed*” (Gal 1:6–9).

Heresy, then, is “a different gospel.” It either contradicts what the Bible teaches about the person and work of Christ, or else it denies that grace is the cause of salvation. Some doctrines or teachings may be different *interpretations* of the Bible, but they don’t rise to the level of being heresy; they’re not “*accursed*” teachings. Furthermore, some teachings which were once considered heresy, may no longer be heresy.

Now, if something *was* heresy but it’s *no longer* heresy, and if previously “heretical” teachings didn’t change, then the orthodoxy of the church must have changed – or at least it went from being unstated, to being stated explicitly. Orthodoxy is what church officials currently understand biblical truth to be, as contained in the Bible, *and* as received from prior generations. Such doctrines are found in the creeds and confessions of the church. Orthodoxy, therefore, does not always equate to biblical truth.

That statement may make you uncomfortable. But let’s look at a real example from church history, of what was previously heresy, but apparently is *no longer* heresy. It has become “orthodox,” or at least it is merely “heterodox” (different from established doctrine).

### **Is Arminianism Heresy?**

In the late 16th century, Jacobus Arminius taught that God’s grace may be resisted, and that salvation may be lost, by personal choice – we may choose or reject Christ at will; and anyone is capable of making that choice. This would seem to contradict John 1.13:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (Joh 1:12-13 <sup>NKJ</sup>)

After his death, Arminius’ followers published the *Remonstrance Articles*, presenting his teachings in the form of a creed. In 1618-19, a Synod met at Dordt (or Dort) to discuss them. Their rulings are called the *Canons of Dordt*. They refuted the Arminian Creed point by point, thus establishing the orthodoxy of the reformed churches on these matters. The *Five Points of Calvinism* (TULIP) were derived from these Canons. Below are a few excerpts. Each Arminian claim is followed by the Synod’s refutation of it.

### **Rejection of the Errors**

*Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those*

Arminians – III. Who teach that Christ, by the satisfaction which he gave, did not certainly merit for anyone salvation itself and the faith by which this satisfaction of Christ is effectively applied to salvation,

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but only acquired for the Father the authority or plenary will to relate in a new way with men and to impose such new conditions as he chose, and that the satisfying of these conditions depends on the free choice of man; consequently, that it was possible that either all or none would fulfill them.

*Synod:* For they have too low an opinion of the death of Christ, do not at all acknowledge the foremost fruit or benefit which it brings forth, and summon back from hell the PELAGIAN error.

Arminians – IV. Who teach that in election to faith a prerequisite condition is that man should rightly use the light of nature, be upright, unassuming, humble, and disposed to eternal life, as though election depended to some extent on these factors.

*Synod:* For this smacks of PELAGIUS, and it clearly calls into question the words of the apostle: We lived at one time in the passions of our flesh, following the will of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in transgressions, made us alive with Christ, by whose grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with him and seated us with him in heaven in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages we might show the surpassing riches of his grace, according to his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith (and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God) not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:3-9).

Arminians – VI. Who make use of the distinction between obtaining and applying in order to instill in the unwary and inexperienced the opinion that God, as far as he is concerned, wished to bestow equally upon all people the benefits which are gained by Christ's death; but that the distinction by which some rather than others come to share in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life depends on their own free choice (which applies itself to the grace offered indiscriminately) but does not depend on the unique gift of mercy which effectively works in them, so that they, rather than others, apply that grace to themselves.

*Synod:* For, while pretending to set forth this distinction in an acceptable sense, they attempt to give the people the deadly poison of PELAGIANISM.

Pelagianism had been declared a *heresy* by the Council of Orange in 529. By saying that the Arminians are *Pelagian*, the Synod of Dordt declared that Arminianism is likewise a *heresy* – another gospel, a denial of the saving work of Jesus Christ, in whole or in part.

Now let's move to our own day, to see how the orthodoxy established by the Synod of Dordt, has changed. Again, if orthodoxy can change, it's not the same as biblical truth, which doesn't change. Orthodoxy is whatever the church declares is biblical truth, as it understands it at the time; heresy, is whatever contradicts that orthodoxy, at the time.

In their fine book, *Why I Am Not An Arminian*, Robert Peterson and Michael Williams make this curious claim:

The Synod of Dort was right to condemn the Arminian representation of the saving ways of God. Yet we do not think of Arminianism as a heresy or Arminian Christians as unregenerate. You see, calling someone a heretic is serious business. *Heresy is not merely doctrinal error; it is damnable error* [italics added]. The heretic so mangles the gospel of Jesus Christ that it no longer communicates the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Heresy is such a corruption of the grace of God in Christ that it invalidates either Jesus as the Savior, or grace as the way of salvation. The Arminian tradition does neither.<sup>2</sup>

They're not saying this about *Wesleyan* Arminianism, which is 3-point Calvinism. They're saying it about the original followers of Arminius, who were condemned by the Synod of Dordt. Professors Peterson and Williams apparently reject the Canons of Dordt, as passé

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<sup>2</sup> Peterson, Robert A. and Williams, Michael D. *Why I am not an Arminian* (IVP Downers Grove IL, 2004), p. 13.

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orthodoxy. They're asserting that Arminianism is no longer heresy, but merely a different way to receive the grace of God – by *man's* choice rather than *God's* choice.

Arminians embrace UNIVERSALISM, which claims that Christ died for all mankind, every man, woman, and child ever born. And yet, all are not saved. Therefore, Christ *did not save* all those for whom he died. He only made them *salvable*. The rest was up to them. How is that different than Adam in the Garden who was *capable* of obedience, and chose to disobey? The Bible says we are born slaves to sin, and must be born again of the Spirit (Rom 6.18). We were corrupted by Adam's fall, and *incapable* of seeing the kingdom until born again by God's regenerating grace (Joh 3.3; Tit 3.5). We cannot hear or understand the Gospel in our flesh (Jo 8.43); it is foolishness to the natural man (1Cor 2.14). Only the elect are regenerated so as to see, hear, understand, and believe the Gospel (Rom 11.7).

Therefore, Arminianism rejects the doctrine of ELECTION. Arminians claim that God chose us beforehand, based on His foreknowledge of who would accept Christ in the future. Thus we're not *foreordained* by God's immutable will, but only *foreknown* by Him. His will is dependent on our will. On its face, that seems unbiblical: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world," (Eph 1:4 <sup>NKJ</sup>). "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." (Joh 6:44 <sup>NKJ</sup>). But that depends on your interpretation of Scripture. If orthodoxy shifts accordingly to interpretation, then so will heresy.

John Owen wrote the following in 1682, the year before his death, describing the change in orthodoxy that was taking place even in his own day:

Formerly we could not meet with a godly minister, that the error of Arminianism was not looked at by him as the ruin and poison of the souls of men. Such godly men trembled at it, wrote, and disputed against it: *but now it is not so*.

In 1700, Christopher Ness wrote this in his preface to *Antidote Against Arminianism*:

As blessed Athanasius sighed in his day, "The world is overrun with Arianism;" so it is the sad sigh of our present times, that the Christian world is overrun, indeed, overwhelmed with the flood of Arminianism; which comes, as it were, out of the mouth of the serpent, that he might cause the woman [the Church] "to be carried away with the flood" of it (Rev 12:15). Lest this overflowing deluge of Arminianism bring destruction upon us, there is great need that some servants of Christ should run to stop the further spreading of this plague and leprosy.

An editor of Ness's *Antidote* (1836), wrote the following, affirming the Canons of Dordt:

Arminianism, that foul heresy, which may be said to be the root and core of all heretical false doctrine, is here completely stripped of its deceitful covering... Modern Arminianism, is but ancient Pelagianism, which reared up in the second century; and Pelagianism is Popery; and Popery is but another name for man's free-will, in opposition to God's free-grace.

But things have changed in our day, and continue to change. The dictionary definition says that heresy is "an opinion or doctrine at variance with *established religious beliefs*," i.e., a traditional understanding of Scripture. But Peterson and Williams say that heresy isn't just "heterodoxy" – it doesn't just differ from the official or orthodox position. Heresy, they say, is *damnable error*. It is such a *wrong* understanding of God's word, that so long as we believe it, we cannot be saved. That's because we've rejected God's grace in Jesus Christ as the sole means of our salvation. To put it another way, "heresy is a rejection of those things which are necessary to *saving faith*."



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### Roman Catholics and Protestants

In an article in *Christianity Today*, Nov. 2007,<sup>3</sup> ETS acting president Hassell Bullock of Wheaton College, suggested that Roman Catholics and Orthodox are “brothers and sisters in Christ” with the Protestants. On a blog review, a Protestant objected to that assertion:

Are we to sit back, make people think it is OK to have a different view, and allow them to believe a damning doctrine? We are saved through faith alone, in Christ alone, by His grace alone. Now, I will dialogue with those who have a different view, but I will not call them brothers in Christ. I will tell them I love them, and want to see them in heaven, and ask them to turn to the truth of Christ found in His word.

A Roman Catholic responded to the Protestant with this:

“Do you believe that one’s eternal destiny turns entirely on whether one believes that justification is *imputed* or *infused*? If so, then virtually no one got the gospel right prior to the 16th century!

After some heated debate, James White chimed in with this sarcastic “letter to Paul.”

*Dear Paul:*

*In reviewing your letter to the churches of Galatia, we, the modern men of the 21st century, have come to the conclusion that you truly missed the point in your very pointed and, may we say, unloving comments regarding the faithful brothers with whom you had but a minor theological difference. We are in particular offended that you would identify men who clearly confess faith in Christ and who have risked their lives for their faith “false brethren.” Who are you to make such a harsh judgment, in light of their many evidences of faith? These men are Christians, and to call them false brethren is a serious sin! You are bearing false witness against them! And to dare to read the intentions of their hearts so as to say they were “sneaking” into the fellowship, is simply beyond the pale. You should be ashamed of yourself! All you disagree on is a minor point of theology! They believe in Christ! They believe in His resurrection! They simply believe that one should be circumcised so as to be a part of the covenant people of God! How narrow of you to exclude them from the fellowship of faith simply on the basis of such a minor thing as this! Why won’t you focus upon the areas of agreement you have? Why focus only upon differences, the negatives? Don’t you realize you will never win people to your views if you continue to act in this fashion? We seriously request that you apologize to the faithful brothers you anathematized in your ill-advised letter to the churches of Galatia. By this, true peace and unity might be achieved!*

Mr. Bauman [another respondent] said that it is “a serious wickedness on your (or anyone’s) part” to say that a person who moves from confession of the solas, to that of Rome, is an apostate. May I ask what then constitutes apostasy in Mr. Bauman’s world? Evidently, the gospel is no longer a part of what defines the Christian faith! So now we only identify as apostates those who engage in formal heresy regarding, say, the Trinity? Hopefully the resurrection? But now it’s “OK” to confess that the Mass is a propitiatory sacrifice that can be approached 20,000 times without bringing perfection, that celibate priests can be called “*alter Christus*” in their ordinations, and that they can, by sacramental power, render Christ present upon Rome’s altars, that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ and infallible in teaching authority, that no grace accrues to anyone outside of Mary by God’s design, and that Mary was Immaculately conceived and bodily assumed into heaven, and that if you die with temporal punishments of sin upon your soul, you undergo *satispassio* in purgatory — and it’s all just a slight difference over *imputation* versus *infusion*?? Are all these dogmatic definitions of the gospel itself just so much minor theological drivel, so that one can confess them or not, and all is well? Is *this* the clarity of modern theology??

<http://www.biblicalcatholic.com/apologetics/a136.htm>

Are the Roman Catholic doctrines listed by James White heresies or not? Notice that he rejects the definition of heresy given by Peterson and Williams. You should know that the definition of heresy is hotly contested today. We’re trying not to offend anyone...

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<sup>3</sup> Article in *Christianity Today*: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/novemberweb-only/145-52.o.html> ETS stands for *Evangelical Theological Society*.

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Behind this shifting of orthodoxy lie two uncomfortable facts. Evangelicalism today is predominantly Arminian — Calvinism is now a minority view. And the governments of the western world are predominantly secular, and opposed to religion in the marketplace of ideas. The Christian clans are circling their wagons, casting off many points of orthodoxy that have divided them for centuries. That has benefits, but it also has dangers. When we cast aside grace as the core of the gospel, we weaken its power to transform lives.

### A Right Understanding

Heresy presupposes that there's a *right* understanding of God's word, which leads us to honor God rightly: *heresy presupposes orthodoxy*. Heresies led the churches to formulate creeds and confessions to refute them. This led to the development of a refined *orthodoxy*, a body of truth that the churches derived from Scripture, *as they understood it*. This limitation in our understanding is acknowledged in the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF, written in 1646). Here is chapter 31, paragraph 4:

All synods or councils, since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice; but they are to be used as a help in both.

Now, there are many orthodox doctrines. Prof. Harold O.J. Brown says that in the early church, "heresy did not refer to simply *any* doctrinal disagreement, but to something that seemed to undercut the very basis for Christian existence... Heresy involved the doctrine of *God*, and the doctrine of *Christ*." That is, it involved either the Trinity, or the person and work of Christ. But don't the five points of Arminianism involve the work of Christ?

We must determine if a belief is merely a break from the traditional interpretation of Scripture, or if it is so far from the Gospel Truth, that it denies Christ. Again, a belief may be *unorthodox* — different from the norm — but not a damnable error. And a damnable error must involve the person and work of Jesus Christ (which includes the Trinity).

However, if we say that something is "unorthodox," but not *wrong*, then "orthodoxy" isn't very useful for church discipline. There can be no *right* understanding of Scripture, if alternative understandings are not *wrong*. Orthodoxy would be unenforceable, and church discipline impossible.

To repeat, ORTHODOXY (or *dogma*), which is the church's declaration of truth, may or may not conform to *Biblical Truth*. Obviously, church councils tried to ensure that the declared dogma of the Church was biblical. But sometimes the church erred and needed to be corrected; its teachings needed to be realigned with Scripture. That's what Martin Luther was doing when he nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Chapel in 1517. Church dogma had strayed from Biblical Truth.

The Roman Catholic Church declared that Protestants were heretics. If they would not recant, they would be declared apostate and put out of the church. The Protestants declared that the Pope and his clergy were *antichrists* — their doctrine and practices were contrary to the truth of Scripture regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ. That is, according to Protestant dogma, Roman Catholics were heretics. What was disputed was *not* the beliefs and practices of one or the other. What was disputed was the legitimacy of each one's dogma — was it *Biblical Truth*, or only truth as defined by *that* church? It is the responsibility of elders to ensure that church orthodoxy conforms to Scripture.

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The Catholic position in opposition to Luther's *Sola Fide* was that the grace of God, by His good pleasure was poured into us. As this pouring or infusing occurred, it made us inherently righteous and thus able to perform good works. They said, by FAITH, our *free will* cooperates with grace, performs the necessary works, and *merits* our salvation. Faith, in that sense, is not a gift but a work (contra Eph. 2:8). JUSTIFICATION, to the Catholic mind, was a process, not an event. Sanctification was not an effect of justification, but the means of justification. The canons of the COUNCIL OF TRENT in 1563 (see chapter 5), lay out the Catholic opposition to the REFORMERS view that God *declares* us justified by faith alone. You can see that Roman Catholicism and Arminianism have a lot in common.

**FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS COURSE**, we accept the doctrines of the Reformation as our ORTHODOXY, and our church's STATEMENT OF BELIEFS as our standard. Those beliefs which contradict them are HERESIES or ERRORS, as we distinguished them above. We'll leave it open as to whether those errors are damnable or not.

We're not Roman Catholic, Arminians, or paedo-baptists. We believe that without church discipline, there can be no church. And without a fixed orthodoxy, there can be no discipline. We need a standard of Biblical Truth, and that standard cannot be based on subjective interpretation. Truth is *fixed* and *exclusive*, or it is not truth at all. Any study of what is and is not a heresy, identifies those beliefs which we are convinced are necessary to *saving faith*; and it rejects contradictory beliefs. But it also rejects beliefs which we are convinced are *incorrect* interpretations of Scripture. Even if such beliefs are *not* necessary to saving faith, they are still error, if only because they contradict our orthodoxy.

Some of what we'll examine in this course is *subtle* – some heresies are hard to distinguish from biblical truth. Satan's lies are never obvious. We'll try to explain why each doctrine matters. As we've seen, the general rule is that every major heresy attacks either who Jesus Christ is, or what He accomplished on the cross. Therefore, the more we understand those two things, the more we'll be able to recognize heresies and errors – no matter how subtle.

The five battle-cries of the Reformation – the *Five Solas* – were a call to sound doctrine and practice. We should be able to recite them at will:

***We're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, by the authority of Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.***

That's a sound STANDARD by which to test the gospel truth of God. For example,

- If **grace** is minimized by basing our *justification* on anything other than a sovereign act of God (e.g., requiring human will or approval), that's a heresy.
- If anything is added to **faith in order to justify us before God** (baptism, communion, works, church membership, etc.) that's a heresy.
- If anything is added to **Christ's perfect life and atoning sacrifice**, as the sole *cause of our justification*, that's a heresy.
- If anyone claims to have spiritual authority, or proclaims a doctrine, that is not clearly stated in or reasonably derived from **God's written word**, that's a heresy.
- If **glory** is diverted from God, so as to draw glory to the things of men – even to the church and its practices, or to the offices or people of the church – that's a heresy.

As you examine each heresy and error listed in this course, try applying the Five Solas as a test. See if you can identify which of the five is contradicted by that heresy, and why.

## 2. HERESIES DESCRIBED IN SCRIPTURE

**IDOLATERS** – 2Cor 6.16; Christians continued to worship or create idols in violation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment (Exo 20.4-5). There were two sins here. The first was using idols in the worship of God; and the second was the continued presence of pagan idols, merely adding Christianity to pagan beliefs (this is called **SYNCRETISM**).

**Response:** “abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood.” Acts 15:20; 1Jn. 5:21

**NICOLAITANS** – Rev. 2:6,14-15 a sect holding to the “teaching of Balaam” which upheld the freedom to eat food offered to idols, and to commit fornication, in opposition to the decree of the Church rendered in Acts 15:20, 29. It was said that they held their wives in common. God clearly says that He hates the Nicolaitans for their lawlessness. There is liberty in Christ (2Cor 3.17), but we uphold the law (Rom 3.31); we are to be holy for God is holy, but we are not under the law (1Pet 1.16; Gal 5.18). How can these two things be reconciled?

**Response 1** – Paul rejected this fear, saying “is that anything?” He provided a weaker-stronger brother standard in 1Cor. 8.7-13 and Rom 14.13 to 15.2. It upholds the freedom we have in Christ concerning food sacrificed to idols, but weighs that freedom against the temptation to new believers. Its bottom line is to avoid it where possible, but not to fret if it happened. As far as the use or presence of idols, or committing fornication, Acts 15:20 is an absolute prohibition. And Rev. 2:20 condemns intentionally eating food sacrificed to idols (i.e., *participating* in idolatry). However, we don’t lower the maturity of the flock, to match the least mature among us. We teach the immature the truth, to raise them up to full maturity in Christ (Eph 4.12-13).

**Response 2** – Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. (1Co 7:2) Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:19-21)

**No Resurrection of the Dead** – 1Cor. 15:12

**Response:** *For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If [it is] in this life only [that] we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.* (1Cor 15.16-19 <sup>NKJ</sup>)

**The resurrection already took place** – *spiritually* – 2Tim 2:16-18

**Response:** *Hymenaeus and Philetus... have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.* We expect a physical resurrection of the bodies of all men at Christ’s return, some to eternal glory, the rest to eternal damnation. (Dan. 12:2; 1Cor 15:23,42,52; 2Cor 5:10)

This error implies there will be no physical resurrection for us (only for Christ), and none for later generations – they somehow missed the boat. It denies Christ’s promise (Joh 6.40); it denies Christ’s Sonship and power (Rom 1.3); and it hints of **DUALISM** (see *Hellenism* below).

## 2. Heresies Described in Scripture

**ANTINOMIANISM** – This is a belief that because we are under grace, obedience is optional. It lets our freedom in Christ, our forgiven state, become a license to sin.

**Response:** *Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we, who are dead to sin, live in it any longer? Rom 6:1,2. Don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be misled: neither the immoral, idolaters, adulterers, the corrupt, the effeminate [boy prostitutes], homosexuals, extortionists, thieves, drunkards, the pugnacious, nor defrauders will inherit the kingdom of God. 1Cor 6:9,10.*

**JUDAISM** - The issue confronted is whether Christianity should remain within Judaism, or become an independent and distinct religion. If it remains within Judaism then,

1. Circumcision is a prerequisite to salvation for men.
2. Obedience to Jewish Law is necessary, including Sabbath and Kosher requirements.

Two groups emerged among the Judaizers of the early church:

**A. Nazarenes** – They taught that Jesus was Messiah whose teachings supersede Moses and the Prophets, but those of Jewish descent must still obey the law (Act 15.5).

**Response:**

1. It denies salvation by faith through Christ's final atoning sacrifice, once for all (Heb 10.10).
2. It undermines obedience inspired by love and thankfulness, and seeks a reward (*works*).

**B. Ebionites** – They taught that Jesus was only a man, even if he was a prophet and spokesman of God (Mat 16.14). Some accepted Jesus' virgin birth. Others said he was born of Joseph and Mary, but then "Christ" (the *Logos*) descended on him at his baptism in the form of a dove. "Christ" departed Jesus prior to his crucifixion and resurrection.

**Response:**

1. It contradicts Scripture. Mary was a virgin, and Joseph was not the father (Mat 1.18-25)
2. It contradicts Scripture. Jeconiah in Mat 1.11 is Jehoiachin, son of Josiah (Jeconiah was renamed Johoiachim, 2Kg. 23:34; 24:6; 2Chr. 36:8). He was cursed in Jer 36:30: none of his offspring would ever again sit on David's throne. Jesus is the son of David and eternally sits on his throne (2Sam 7.13; Heb 1.18). Joseph, therefore, *cannot* be the father of Jesus.

### "Imported" beliefs

**HELLENISM** – Greek philosophy found its way into Christian theology, especially the distinction between spirit and matter, often referred to as DUALISM.<sup>4</sup> It had two major streams, one from the Greek philosopher Plato, the other from middle eastern sects.<sup>5</sup>

**A. Platonism** (following the teachings of Plato) and **Neo-Platonism**. The philosophy of Plato was used to analyze and restate Christian Truth. The result: flesh and matter are seen as evil, while pure spirit is good. The impetus for its development is that Platonism affords an explanation for sin continuing in the lives of Christian converts.

**Response:** This ignores the fall, and the fleshly or sinful nature (Gr. *sarx*). It's true, there is pervasive depravity in our faculties, corrupting their proper function. Thus we say, *the power of sin is broken at conversion, but the presence of sin remains*. Yet, we have been given the Spirit, and may choose whether to be led by the flesh, or by the Spirit (see Rom 8.1-13).

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<sup>4</sup> DUALISM also refers to existence being ruled by two principles: good and evil. It results in the belief that Satan is equal and opposite to Yahweh. Thus, God is not sovereign in all matters, because Satan has an exclusive domain of his own.

<sup>5</sup> To HINDUS, Jesus' claim that, "The Father and I are one" confirmed the Hindu idea that everyone, through rigorous spiritual practice, can realize his own universal "god-consciousness." This too is another form of dualism.

## 2. Heresies Described in Scripture

### *Aberrations of Platonism-*

1. Christ was spirit, not flesh, and therefore he didn't suffer on the cross.
2. The resurrection is spiritual, not physical and therefore it takes place daily.
3. Sex is evil, food is evil, drink is evil, etc.
4. Asceticism and mysticism are paths to true righteousness.

**Response:** "These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh." (see Col 2:20-23) "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is* nothing unclean of itself." (Rom 14:14) "I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind." (1Co 14:15)

**B. Gnosticism** - Prominent Gnostics included Simon Magus (the Samaritan magician found in the Book of Acts), Basilides of Alexandria, and Valentinus of Alexandria. This heresy has its source in "gnosis" or *special knowledge* (sole truth) that has been revealed and transmitted secretly (and only) to the initiates of the sect. It teaches that,

1. Salvation is the freeing of spirit from flesh.
2. Salvation is attained by teaching revealed truth through "mysteries" which return the individual to pure spirit in stages (mysteries were ceremonies with mystical effects on participants).
3. Christian and Jewish writings are purely allegorical and must be properly interpreted by one with special knowledge to reveal the underlying truth.
4. Other teachings of Jesus exist outside of written Scripture, entrusted to those with the hidden knowledge for transmission orally to deserving initiates.
5. God is not a being with personality but is the all-permeating 1st Principle, 1st Cause and True Love *without form*. This denies the Person of the Father, and it denies that Christ is God incarnate.
6. Satan is the God of the Old Testament (called Demiurge) and the creator of the world of matter. This is a form of DUALISM (see *Hellenism*, above).

**Response:** Gnosticism minimized (a) the historical elements of Scripture; (b) Christ's actual existence, crucifixion, and physical resurrection as a man; (c) the tangible and historical participation of God in the lives of his people individually, and in the life of Israel as a nation (this is *contra* Act 17:28; Heb 1:3).

**Manicheanism** is a form of *Gnosticism*. Augustine was a Manichean for 9 years (374-383). This was a blend of Zoroastrianism and Christianity, borrowing concepts and terminology from both. Manicheans believed that the universe is dominated by two competing forces of good and evil, represented by light and darkness. It taught that the physical world is inherently evil, and that salvation is obtained primarily through knowledge. Its founder, Mani, often claimed to be the reincarnation of religious figures such as Jesus or Buddha. Manichaeism did not survive very long.

**Response:** Jer 31:33-34; Mat 11:25; Psalms 19:7; Psalm 119:105, 130; Proverbs 1:23.

"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' ***for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them***, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jer 31:33-34)

## 2. Heresies Described in Scripture

**C. Pantheism** – This term has a number of meanings, literally, “all-God” — all is God, and God is all. In this worldview, “God” is an all-inclusive term describing Nature without personality; or it’s a belief that “God” is that life-force which resides innately in all things, something like “the force” in Star Wars. When Carl Sagan and others speak of the “Cosmos,” or “Mother Nature,” as if it were a god or goddess, that’s pantheism.

Substituting the laws of science for God, is a form of pantheism. It equates God with creation; or it places the Creator *within* His Creation, instead of above and outside it.

The term pantheism also applies to those who consider all gods equal, or co-existent. It denies that any god is THE God, even if one is the “chief” god. Greek, Roman, and Norse cultures had a pantheon of gods, with a rich mythology describing them in human terms. Jesus is perceived as one god among many.

**ANIMISM** is a form of *pantheism*, in which there is a spirit of each natural object, or a soul in every living creature.

**Response:** “I *am* the LORD, and *there is no other*; *There is no God besides Me.*” (Isa 45:5) “For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: “I *am* the LORD, and *there is no other.*” (Isa 45:18) “Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I *am* God, and *there is no other.* (Isa 45:22) “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Mat 22:37)

***We’re saved by grace alone (G), through faith alone (F), in Christ alone (C), by the authority of Scripture alone (S), to the glory of God alone (Y).***

Apply these standards to each of the heresies you’ve just seen. Which of these standards is set aside in favor of another means or source of salvation, truth, or worship? Put the letter of the violated sola(s) beside each one.

Idolatry: \_\_\_\_\_

Nicolaitans (idolatry and immorality are OK): \_\_\_\_\_

No Resurrection: \_\_\_\_\_

Antinomianism (optional obedience): \_\_\_\_\_

Judaism still valid (works): \_\_\_\_\_

Hellenism (*dualism* – physical is evil): \_\_\_\_\_

Gnosticism (extra-biblical knowledge): \_\_\_\_\_

Pantheism (all gods are equal): \_\_\_\_\_

Animism (all living things are spirits/gods): \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. HERESIES DURING THE EARLY CHURCH

**MARCIONITES** - Marcion was the son of a wealthy bishop. He was raised as a Christian. He went to Rome in 138 or 139 and taught the following:

1. Nature is Dualistic.
2. The God of the Old Testament was evil.
3. There is no secret body of knowledge or allegorical interpretation of Scripture.
4. The DEMIURGE created men and their souls (see *Gnosticism* in chapter 2).
5. A second God, hidden until Christ's coming, is the God of Love.
6. The God of Love undertook to rescue men he didn't create and owed nothing to the Demiurge.
7. The God of Love revealed himself in Jesus who was not born of men through the DEMIURGE, but was only a phantom who seemed to be a man. This was called **DOCETISM** from the Greek word meaning "to appear."
8. Sexual union was forbidden.
9. Marriage was rejected.
10. Martyrdom was prized.

Marcion was an organizer and gathered his followers into churches. He assembled probably the first authoritative collection of early Christian writings, which later came into Eusebius' possession (who provided the only source we have for our knowledge of the first three centuries of the church).

Marcion not only rejected the Old Testament, but much of the New Testament. He saw two different gods described: an angry and vengeful God of the Old, *Jewish* writings, and the loving God of the New, *Christian* writings. But Marcion held that only the Gospel of Luke and the writings of Paul are true. He was an anti-Semite.

*This is a selective approach to Scripture.* It picks and chooses only those portions of the Bible that agree with our pre-conceived notions of the truth. Today's expressions of it include liberalism, neo-evangelicalism, ecumenism, the Emergent Church Movement, opposition to penal substitution, New Perspectives on Paul, Dispensationalism, and Christian *minimalism* ("What's the least I need to believe in order to be a Christian?") Don't confuse that with "What must I believe to be *saved*?"

<https://www.monergism.com/marcions-have-landed-warning-evangelicals>

**MONTANISM** - c.156-172 Montanus was raised in Phrygia in Asia Minor. His movement is sometimes called the "**Phrygian**" movement. Its teachings include,

1. Revival of prophets and new revelation.
2. Asceticism, fasting, celibacy, and martyrdom as path to righteousness.
3. An early end of the world.
4. Imminent second coming of Christ.
5. The New Jerusalem would be an ideal society located ... at Phrygia, of course.
6. Speaking in tongues is the sign of salvation.
7. There will be a millennial reign of Christ (a belief called "Chiliasm").

These teachings are reflected today in "charismania," or Pentecostalism. The Montanists, on the up side, opposed *sacerdotalism* (separating clergy and laity, with clergy serving as mediators with God), and they favored independent churches.



### 3. Heresies During the Early Church

**MODALISM** – This teaches that God emerges from the abstract whole of his being to take on the attributes of a man at times, or Father/Creator at other times, or Holy Spirit as his present “mode” of being. In other words, God appears or acts in three different *modes* or *aspects*, revealed one at a time as Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. Then he returns to his abstract whole. **Sabellius** was a modalist, c. 220. Using water, ice, and steam to describe the Trinity would be modalistic. The image of an egg comprised of yolk, white, and shell is also modalistic. It suggests that no person of the Godhead is sufficient of himself to be God; rather, each is a *portion* of God. But God is One, not several, and not a composite. (Deu 6:4; Joh 10:30) Jesus is not *like* God, he is *truly* God. How to conceive of the Trinity comes up at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD.

**SCHISMS** (or splits) -

**A. Novation Schism.** Novatian was a presbyter of the Roman church. His followers voiced dissatisfaction with lax moral practices and with the lenient treatment of those who denied the faith during the persecutions of the church. Novatian began a parallel church by appointing his own bishops. His opponents included Calistus, Bishop of Rome, who taught that no sin is unforgivable if the sinner is genuinely contrite. Calistus also pointed to the parable of the wheat and the tares to describe the composition of the church as a whole which was not to be pre-judged by its participants. Other famous opponents included Stephen of Rome, Cyprian of Carthage, Clement of Alexandria (215), and Origen of Alexandria (182-251). Novatians taught:

1. There is no forgiveness of sins *after* salvation -OR-
2. There is no forgiveness of “deadly” sins *after* salvation.

Tertullian defined the seven deadly sins as idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, fornication, false-witness, and fraud. The definition of deadly sins was an instant hit, and everyone began a list of the “big 7.”

**Response:** Scripture teaches there are no better or worse sins (Jas 2:10; *compare* Luk 12:47-48); the unforgivable sin is the blaspheming the Holy Spirit by identifying Him with Satan (Matt.12:24-31) or by worshipping Satan despite complete knowledge of the freedom offered in Christ (Heb.6).

**B. Donatists** – These were Carthaginian **rigorists**, who hadn’t backed down during Diocletian’s persecution (c. 303-305). They refused to accept the appointment of a new bishop of Carthage by a Roman Pope who had indeed backed down. They called him “traditore” or “hand-over of the Scriptures.” Rather than submit to his rule, the Donatists appointed their own bishop who was succeeded by Donatus in 316, from whom the schism took its name. This resulted in the development of a dual church system with Popes and counter-Popes (or anti-Popes), bishops and counter-bishops.

The Donatist adherents were primarily North African and non-Latin. The split may have been worsened by racial tension. When the Christian Emperor Constantine called a synod under pressure from the Donatists (who by then had appointed some 270 bishops), those of the “Catholic Church” refused to attend. Constantine tried to compel attendance by force, but then gave up on that. Later, AUGUSTINE tried to act as mediator between the feuding groups, but failed. The Donatists remained independent until the Vandals sacked Rome in 455.

### 3. Heresies During the Early Church

**Response:** It's true that Revelation says, "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev 2:10) But that is for the individual to embrace and submit to – not for others to judge him by. "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand." (Rom 14:4)

**Purgatory** – Because the Donatists remained true to Christ despite torture and death, while others broke under duress, and denied Christ, the Donatists demanded that those who were broken should be excluded from the Church. Pope Gregory I (c. 540) decided to put an end to this dispute between the strong and the weak. He applied purgatory, which was first introduced by Clement of Alexandria (150-215).<sup>6</sup> It would be a place between earth and heaven where those who had denied Christ could do penance and regain their salvation. Over time, this concept came to be a place to do penance for all unrepented sins during this life. It nicely fit the Catholic doctrine of works.

**Response:** "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment..." (Heb 9:27) There is no intermediary place of penance. See the parable of Lazarus, Luk 16.19-31.

**ARIANISM** - The Arian controversy lasted from the time of Constantine in 318 until 451 when the COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON finally put it to rest. Arius, a priest in Alexandria, ***denied the true divinity of Jesus Christ***. He taught that the Son was not eternal but was *created* by the Father; therefore the Son was not God by nature. He had a changeable nature. His honor and dignity were earned from the Father by Jesus' righteous life on earth, rather than being inherent in Jesus' identity as God. He said Jesus was not "consubstantial" with the Father (i.e. of the same substance). The Holy Spirit was begotten by the Logos (Christ), and therefore was less than either the Son or the Father.

Arius' bishop, ALEXANDER, condemned Arius' teachings and defrocked him and his followers. However, Arius had many sympathizers throughout the empire; and so, a major conflict arose. Eusebius writes that the dispute was so intense that "the Christian religion afforded a subject of profane merriment to the pagans, even in their theaters." Constantine was upset with both Alexander and Arius. He wrote each of them and said, "There was no need to make these questions public ... since they are problems that idleness alone raises, and whose only use is to sharpen men's wits ... these are silly actions worthy of inexperienced children, and not of priests or reasonable men." Constantine called for the first ecumenical council of the church to resolve the dispute. It met at **Nicea** in 325 (see chapter 5 on church councils). The bishops who met there debated the nature of the person of Jesus Christ for over two months. Arius was opposed in the debate by the archdeacon **Athanasius** from Alexandria. Arius lost. The Nicene creed reference to the nature of the person of Jesus Christ reads "being one essence (*homo-ousios*) with the Father." Arius and his followers were banished from the empire.

Although settled in theory, Constantine wavered on the issue (his sister was an Arian) and he permitted some of the bishops to return from exile in 328. They immediately began a series of political maneuverings that led to the exile of Athanasius in 335, who was then bishop of Alexandria. Arius was declared orthodox and was scheduled for reinstatement in the church when he died in 336. The conflict continued for 150 years. The final

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<sup>6</sup> *Patres Graeci*. IX, col. 332. Also Origen, *Commentary on Luke*, 24th Homily, before 253 A.D.

### 3. Heresies During the Early Church

orthodox Nicene formula is this: “The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and from the Son*.” This final phrase “and from the Son” is called the *filioque*.

There are two other heresies related to the nature of the Godhead.

**Nestorians** – c. 428. Also known as *Adoptionism*. Nestor was from the Antiochene school. He taught that Christ, as man, is the adoptive Son of God, not God incarnate. He had two separate natures. The two natures were united in love, but separated in essence. The orthodox position is that Christ is one *person* with two *natures*, one human and one divine. The Nestorian heresy is that Christ comprises two *persons*; one with a human nature, and the other with a divine nature. If there are two distinct persons in Jesus Christ, Mary would be the mother of the human person only. The reference to Mary as Mother of God (*Theotokos*) was anathema to the Nestorians, who referred to her as “Christotokos” (Mother of Christ). Nestor was opposed by Eusebius of Dorylaeum.

**Monophysites** – They taught that Christ has one predominant nature. Monophysitism was a reaction to the dual nature/person teaching of Nestorianism. It led to the formal secession of the Coptic and Armenian churches from the rest of the Christian church. Although they accepted the formulation of the Nicene Creed, they fought over the way in which divinity and humanity are joined in Christ Jesus. They could not reconcile the fact that God (and therefore the *divine nature* of Christ) was unchangeable, immutable and eternal, while *human nature* is changeable and temporal. There were two camps:

- ANTIOCHIAN Monophysites stressed Christ’s *human nature*, because they believed that Christ needed to be truly human if he were to be the savior of human beings.
- ALEXANDRIAN Monophysites stressed Christ’s *divinity* because he needed to be truly God if he were to teach divine truth.

**PELAGIANISM** – c. 400 AD. This is a DOCTRINE OF WORKS and thus a rejection of *salvation by grace*. It denies that man is incapable of doing what God expects in the way of obedience to the Law. Pelagius was appalled by rampant sin in the Church at Rome. He believed this was the natural result of Augustine’s teaching on grace. And so he taught,

1. Man is basically good and only morally weak, and is therefore capable of perfect obedience (rejects “total depravity”). God only requires what man is capable of doing.
2. Even if Adam had not sinned, he would have died (the Tree of Life is a metaphor).
3. Adam’s sin harmed only himself, not the human race (no original sin). Therefore, infant baptism is unnecessary to wipe away original sin. Newborns are in the same state as Adam before his fall (innocent).
4. The whole human race neither dies through Adam’s sin and death, nor rises again through the resurrection of Christ (Christ’s death did not atone – it was a sacrificial example).
5. The (Mosaic Law) is as good a guide to heaven as the Gospel (the Law remains). Christ lived in such a way as to provide an example for us.
6. Even before the advent of Christ there were men who were without sin. Christ was not unique; his righteousness is not imputed to us; we earn our own salvation.

Pelagius’ teachings were condemned at the Councils of Carthage (c. 415), Orange (529), Ephesus (431), Trent (1546), and by the Protestants in their Confessions such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Helvetic, Augsburg, Gallican, and Belgic Confessions, the Anglican Articles, and the Canons of Dort. As we saw, a milder version arose in the 1600s, called **Arminianism**.

### 3. Heresies During the Early Church

**MONASTICISM** - As Christianity became more and more the haven of the general population, its standards became more and more lax. God's people became displaced by the teeming masses. TWO EXTREMES in the church drove some believers into monasteries; they hoped to preserve the original documents and teachings of the church:

1. **antinomianism** (at the far left) taught that the Christian was above the law and beyond mere morality, and could therefore do as he pleased. "Once saved, always saved" was corrupted into "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we *live*."
2. **rigorists** (at the far right) taught with Puritanical fervor, that the perfection of the person and the soul is an attainable goal in this lifetime; in some versions of their teaching, it was a goal that could be *surpassed*. Mere salvation wasn't enough.

Between these two extremes arose a group of Christian purists who were frustrated by the lack of commitment in the church body. They secluded themselves in trial communities called *monasteries* to work out a formula for Christian living. It quickly degenerated into an escapist retreat on the one hand, and an elitist club on the other. If martyrdom was no longer the mark of someone who had made it, then perhaps a monk's habit and hairdo might be an appropriate alternative — a mark of distinction and apartness — the sign of someone who might be envied but not imitated.

Jeremy Jackson in *No Other Foundation*, points out the underlying dangers of the "monastic solution" to Christian nominalism, in these cautions:

1. People, being gregarious by nature, tend to gather together in flocks. Flocks, by identifying themselves distinctly from all other flocks, also tend to exclude all others. They are inherently alienating.
2. A flock tends to feather its own nest, cater to the internal needs of its members, and thereby it tends to "become a service organization, gratifying human egos, human mores, human traditions. The Gospel is then adapted to society, instead of society being adapted to the Gospel."
3. "Anyone who takes Jesus' words seriously is thought to be either a fanatic, whose conduct is vaguely threatening, or a super-saint, whose example is not for the likes of us." (p. 64)

Why has the church tended to follow these two tracks of LEGALISM and NOMINALISM? Why does the church compromise so readily, and follow secular fads so easily? Jackson tells us, "Just as the secular mind prefers to push Christ aside and talk about Paul or Augustine or Luther, so the ecclesiastical mind, the mind absorbed in the church as a mere institution, is more taken with the thoughts and deeds of churchmen than with the Word of the Founder of the Church."

#### **Internal and External Idols**

**MYSTICISM** had become a major force in about 500 when the works of the Greek theologians were published under the pseudonym of "Dionysius the Areopagite." They were probably developed in the MONOPHYSITE circles of Syria. They gained wide acceptance as sub-apostolic expositions of how the celestial hierarchy of God and the angels was related to the ecclesiastical hierarchy of bishops and priests with their sacraments. The writings of Dionysius formed the basis for the thought of BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX and THOMAS AQUINAS. This period therefore not only knit East and West together in a unified mythology (we call it a meta-narrative), but also past and present.

### 3. Heresies During the Early Church

**ICONOCLASTS** – the church adopts the use of icons, statues, stained glass, and story-laden pictures to further the teachings of the church in a world that cannot read or write. They soon fall into misuse and are treated as holy objects, worthy of worship in themselves – the representation becomes an idol. Transubstantiation has its roots here.

**THE CHURCH AS STATE** – In 380, Christianity became the official religion of Rome. When the force of Visigoths led by Alaric took and sacked Rome in 410, and when in 430 (as Augustine lay dying in Hippo) the Vandals besieged the city, it was just the beginning of 600 years of barbarian invasions. Rome was no longer the center of world power. It changed to Constantinople. A political power vacuum emerged. The church became the only organized institution capable of exercising civil dominion over a large territory.

***We're saved by grace alone (G), through faith alone (F), in Christ alone (C), by the authority of Scripture alone (S), to the glory of God alone (Y).***

Apply these standards to each of the heresies you've just seen. Which of these standards is set aside in favor of another means or source of salvation, truth, or worship? Put the letter(s) of which solas have been violated, beside each heresy. *Be prepared to say why.*

Marcionites: (*dualism*, OT God is evil, NT God is love): \_\_\_\_\_

Marcionites: (no sex or marriage): \_\_\_\_\_

Docetism (Jesus only *appeared* to be a man): \_\_\_\_\_

Montanism (asceticism): \_\_\_\_\_

Modalism (God in three modes, not persons): \_\_\_\_\_

Novation (no forgiveness after salvation): \_\_\_\_\_

Donatists (no forgiveness if we deny Christ): \_\_\_\_\_

Purgatory (afterlife place to pay for sin): \_\_\_\_\_

Arianism (Jesus is created, changeable): \_\_\_\_\_

Nestorians (Jesus is adopted son): \_\_\_\_\_

Monophysites (Jesus is divine, or human, not both): \_\_\_\_\_

Pelagianism (salvation by works): \_\_\_\_\_

Monasticism (the law is dead, *or* being ascetic): \_\_\_\_\_

Mysticism (looking within, or superstitious beliefs): \_\_\_\_\_

Icons (worshipping objects as sacred): \_\_\_\_\_

Church as State (coercing belief & practice): \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. HERESIES THAT BECAME ORTHODOXY

Gregory I referred to himself as “the servant of the servants of God.” To Gregory, as it was to Augustine, pride is a vicious hound that dogs us relentlessly, that “raises itself up against all the members of the soul, and as a universal death and disease corrupts the whole body.” <sup>7</sup>

Gregory incorporated into church theology, not only the teachings of the early fathers, which he passed on to the church of the middle ages, but also the superstitions and pagan beliefs of the common populace. Once formulated, *this body of theology became orthodoxy for subsequent theologians and bishops*. For example:

**Sacerdotalism** – Separating clergy and laity, rejecting the priesthood of all believers. In the Lord’s Supper, the wine was reserved for priests alone, as a mark of distinction. From this separation came INDULGENCES, PRIESTLY INTERCESSION, the CONFESSIONAL BOOTH, and IMPUTATION of righteousness from a *priest*, instead of from *Christ alone*.

**Imputed Sin and Free Will** – Adam’s fall only weakened our freedom of will. Therefore under grace we may win merit for ourselves by good works.

**Repentance** – For sins committed after baptism the process of forgiveness involves remorse, confession and then meritorious works. The greater the sin, the greater the need for penitence, or paying back. Whether it is enough remains a mystery till death.

**Intercession of the Saints** – Because the effectiveness of our penance is unknown, we may appeal to past saints for intercession on our behalf with Christ. Gregory did not originate this belief, but he did ratify it.

**Holy Relics** – Saints’ and Martyrs’ locks of hair, finger nails, toes, garments etc. were believed to have great power especially for defense against evil.

**Pilgrimages** – This was in aid of searching for holy relics, holy water from a fountain in Jerusalem, resulting in idolatry or an excessive reverence of earthly places. This opposes Jesus’ caution in Joh 4.21-24, “The hour is coming when you will worship neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, ...but in spirit and truth.”

**Purgatory** – A middle ground to finish sanctification after death if full penance had not been made in this life. We saw this in chapter 3.

**Eucharist** – The bread and wine were “transubstantiated” or transmuted into the actual blood and flesh of Christ. The meal was seen as a sacrifice offered by the priest for the sins of men — not the same as Christ’s sacrifice for all his people — but for the post-baptismal sins of its participants, or for those who had already departed and were in purgatory (it provided an early release). The term “transubstantiated” became orthodoxy in 1215 at the 4th Lateran Council

In all these things, we see a passion to “do” for God, for self, and for others. It is a compulsion to gain worth, and accrue merit — to become deserving of God’s great gift. And it seems that all of this is a consequence of guilt, rather than thankfulness for freedom from God’s wrath.

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<sup>7</sup> Gregory, *Moral*. xxxiv, 23.

#### 4. Heresies That Became Orthodoxy

This misperception of God's grace colors church theology for the next 1,000 years. *And* for the next 1000 years, the church retained political as well as spiritual control over the world — until King Henry VIII challenged the Romish Pope and won. This stimulated corrective action within and against the Roman Catholic Church by Protestant reformers, such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli.

But the **Reformation** of the Church had many hurdles to overcome. Some were *political*; these were issues of power. Some were *economic*; there was a lot of money involved. Some were *cultural*; society had its expectations and norms, and hated change. And some were *intellectual*; there were genuine disagreements over doctrine. But we can't ignore the fact that doctrine was being driven or influenced by those other three hurdles.

#### The Church as an Idol

While the church held its power and control, church offices were highly prized. Those who attained those positions wielded enormous influence, and gained enormous wealth. But the power and wealth of the church intoxicated, and corrupted. It led to abuses, doctrinal error, persecutions, and abominations. The church became an idol, to serve and worship. It became an engine of war and domination, because its leaders had abandoned the principles of the Christian faith. Over time, the church had become a *civic* institution, instead of being the Bride of Christ. In the late 1700's, America chose to separate church and state because of those historic abuses; it was the churchmen of America who pushed for that separation. It wasn't that they opposed the church influencing and participating in the state; rather, they opposed the state influencing and participating in the church. That was what they saw as the cause of the church's corruption for a thousand years.

#### Faith and Reason

**SCHOLASTICISM** - Universities arose in the 12th and 13th centuries as associations or guilds of teachers with theology as their major subject. Paris became a leading university, as did Bologna. They were chartered from the Pope and pursued the relation of faith and reason. The questions they sought answers to include these:

1. Is God's revelation that culminated in Christ consistent with reason? Or are the two contradictory?
2. If the two are compatible, which should have priority, the faith which is the basis of Christian commitment, or man's reason?
3. Can reason demonstrate as true, what the Christian believes about God?
4. If it cannot, does what is received by faith complement what is reached by reason, or do the two contradict each other?
5. If reason seems to deny what the Christian accepts on faith as given by God, should he follow reason and discard faith, or can he find some way to hold to both?

The method used by Scholasticism to reach answers to these questions was Aristotelian logic (if, then, else, therefore) and the dialectic of Plato's Socrates (leading the listener to a conclusion by a series of probing questions). To acquaint themselves with the Greek philosophers the Scholastics used the only texts they had, the Latin materials available in the monastic libraries. They began to search out original Greek works or alternative translations from Persia, where the **Nestorian** heretics had left them in 400. They began to attend Moslem schools which carried Syriac translations, and Arab schools in Spain where Jews, Christians and Moslems studied together. The Eastern theology of

#### 4. Heresies That Became Orthodoxy

Constantinople was encountered; it brought to the West this “new wave” theology. From the Hellenistic world, a mixture of Mediterranean cultures, we get these concepts:

**A. Realism** - Plato declared that words or phrases which describe “universals” have an independent existence from the individual units which comprise them. We have coined the phrase, “the whole is more than the sum of its parts” to describe this approach. As applied to theology, this would mean that mankind as a whole has been corrupted by the sin of Adam. The saving work of Christ is therefore for mankind as a whole, and not for isolated individual men (this is *universalism*: Christ died for all equally). The church, then, is more than the sum of individual Christians or local congregations (implying that the clergy at Rome, and the Pope in particular, are the “head of the Church”).

**B. Nominalism** - This school of thought maintains that only particular things are real, and universals are merely words coined by the intellect. Terms such as mankind, city, nation, animal and church are concepts of the mind. Only individual objects and events exist. Men, seeing what they believe to be resemblances between objects, invent abstract terms to group individual objects together. Therefore, the Trinity must refer to three individual gods, no matter what concept we try to link them with.

**THE NEED FOR REFORM** – Martin Luther, in 1517, nailed his famous 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Chapel in hopes of having a debate on some questionable church teaching and practices. By the time the dust settled, the Roman Catholic Church would never be the same. The essence of his charges flow from five principles called the **Solas**:

- **Sola Scriptura** – the standard of truth is the Bible alone, not the church or Pope
- **Solus Christus** – salvation is by Christ alone, not by sacraments, not by priests
- **Sola Gratia** – salvation is by grace alone, not by works, not by penance
- **Sola Fide** – salvation is by faith alone, not by faith plus anything else
- **Soli Deo Gloria** – everything we do is for the Glory of God alone; everything that has been done for us by God is for His glory alone; nothing we do merits His grace.

**ARMINIANISM** – c. 1610 There are a number of similarities between ARMINIANISM and PELAGIANISM (Arminianism is often called SEMI-PELAGIANISM). Arminius was a Calvinist who challenged the extent of the atonement. He believed that Christ died for the whole world, and that man has free will capable of accepting or rejecting God’s grace. This was in opposition to Augustine’s teaching, which Calvin had accepted. After Arminius died, his followers developed the five points of Arminianism in a remonstrance or list of objections to Calvinism. And so they were called the REMONSTRANTS. The followers of Calvin and Augustine responded with their own five points of Calvinism (acronym TULIP – see chapter 5, *Synod of Dordt*). We’ll list here the **FIVE POINTS OF ARMINIANISM**:

**1. Free-Will or Human Ability** – Although human nature was seriously affected by the Fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does not interfere with man’s freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man’s freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power to either cooperate with God’s Spirit and be regenerated or resist God’s grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit’s assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit



#### 4. Heresies That Became Orthodoxy

before he can believe, for faith is man's act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinner's gift to God; it is man's contribution to salvation.

**2. Conditional Election** – God's choice of certain individuals to be saved, made before the foundation of the world, was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based His choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man's will. It was left entirely up to man as to who would believe and therefore as to who would be elected unto salvation. God chose those whom He knew would, of their own free will, choose Christ. Thus the sinner's choice of Christ, not God's choice of the sinner, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

**3. Universal Redemption or General Atonement** – Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved, but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe on Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it.

**4. The Holy Spirit Can Be Effectually Resisted** – The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation; He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) proceeds and makes possible the new birth. Thus, man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work. The Holy Spirit can only draw to Christ those who allow Him to have His way with them. Until the sinner responds, the Spirit cannot give life. God's grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be, and often is, resisted and thwarted by man.

**5. Falling from Grace** – Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith, etc. Please note that not all Arminians have agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ – that once a sinner is regenerated, he can never be lost.

**ARMINIANISM** was rejected by every major voice of the Reformation, and every major council. It found a modern voice in John Wesley, however, and was then popularized during the Revivals of the 1880's by Charles Finney, especially among the populist Baptists and Methodists.

*Here is a succinct comparison of three incorrect views of man's role in salvation:*

PELAGIANISM: God chose those whom He saw beforehand would accept His grace.

SEMI-PELAGIANISM: Salvation is partly God's mercy and partly our works.

LUTHERANISM: God chose some, but rejected those whom he foresaw would reject Him.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Kleyn and Beeke, *Reformation Heroes* (Reform. Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, 2009), p. 169.

## 5. HERESIES REFUTED BY CREEDS AND COUNCILS

In chapter 1, we learned that heresies forced churches to formulate creeds of orthodoxy to refute the heresies. When false teachings became widespread among the churches, they were refuted in writing, to preserve biblical truth and ensure unity among the churches. Once orthodoxy is established, those who refuse to submit to it, are either disciplined, or put out of the church. Their teachings are publicly condemned to warn believers, and to protect them from false teachers, who are wolves among the sheep (Mat 7.15; Act 20.29).

To illustrate the development of orthodoxy in response to heresy, we'll list several creeds, and councils, and the heresies each rejected. You'll see the progression of orthodoxy, but you'll also see the persistence of heresies – the constant need to preserve God's truth.

### c. AD 50 – Council of Jerusalem,

Against **JUDAIZERS**. This was the prototype and forerunner of later ecumenical councils. It is described in Acts chapter 15.

Certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small DISSENT and DISPUTE with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

The issue was this: *Must you first become a Jew before you may become a Christian?* Having arrived at Jerusalem:

Some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise [the Gentile believers], and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.” Now the *apostles* and *elders* came together to consider this matter.

Here is the reasoning that governs the ruling:

“Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

‘After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.’ <sup>Amo 9.11</sup>

James then decrees the council's decision:

“**THEREFORE** I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. (Act 15:1-20 <sup>NKJ</sup>)

### 314 – Council of Ancyra – DONATISTISM.

The disciplinary decrees of this council were the first to be enacted after the persecutions ceased. It provided for disciplining the “lapsed.” The apostates were obliged to acknowledge in public their adherence to the national religion of the empire, and were then provided with a government certificate of the fact, to keep them from further trouble. The state *forced* them to worship idols. When they repented for breaking under pressure, the church *disciplined* them for their weakness. That's DONATISM. Harnack writes:

“The Church condemned this [certificate], as lying and denying the faith. After the end of the Diocletian persecution, these unhappy people were partly excommunicated, and partly obliged to submit to severe discipline. e.g., ‘I, Diogenes, have constantly sacrificed and made offerings,

## 5. Heresies Refuted by Creeds and Councils

and have eaten in your presence the sacrificial meat, and I petition you to give me a certificate.' Who today, without deep emotion, can read this paper and measure the trouble and terror of heart under which the Christians of that day collapsed?"<sup>9</sup>

The Council of Ancyra decreed that penitents fell into four classes or degrees of penitence:

1. **WEEPERS** – who prostrated themselves at the church doors in mourning garments begging to return to good standing from both clergy and laity.
2. **HEARERS** – who were allowed to hear the Scripture lessons and the sermon, but not join the body.
3. **KNEELERS** – who attended public prayers, but only on their knees while the rest stood.
4. **STANDERS** – who could take part in the entire worship service standing, but they were excluded from the communion.

The Canons assigned those who denied Christ, or whose conduct was notorious, into one of these four degrees. They would progress from the more serious degree of penitence, to a lesser degree – so much time in one, before proceeding to the next. For example:

**Canon 4** – Concerning those who have been forced to sacrifice, and who, in addition, have partaken of feasts in honour of the idols; as many as were haled away,<sup>10</sup> but afterwards went up with a cheerful countenance, and wore their costliest apparel, and partook with indifference of the feast provided; it is decreed that all such be hearers for one year, and prostrators for three years, and that they communicate in prayers only for two years, and then return to full communion.

**Canon 5** – As many, however, as went up in mourning attire and sat down and ate, weeping throughout the whole entertainment, if they have fulfilled the three years as prostrators, let them be received without oblation; and if they did not eat, let them be prostrators two years, and in the third year let them communicate without oblation, so that in the fourth year they may be received into full communion.

### 325 – Council of Nicea – Trinitarian Formula.

A priest named Arius presented his argument that Jesus Christ was not an eternal being; He was created at a certain point in time by the Father. Bishops such as Alexander and the deacon Athanasius argued the opposite position: that Jesus Christ is eternal, just like the Father is. It was an argument pitting *trinitarianism* (God is One, in three persons – against *Monarchianism* (God is one, and the Son of God is a separate being). Monarchians seek to explain this relationship of Father to Son, without causing a division within God. Tertullian (155-240 AD) evidenced that most Christians of his day were Monarchian, when he mentioned their startled reaction to his teaching of “three in one.” He opposed it, as did Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen of Alexandria.

By 325, the dispute endangered the unity of Christendom. Constantine summoned 300 bishops to a council to make a decision by majority vote, defining who Jesus Christ is in relation to God the Father. The statement of doctrine they produced is called the “Nicene Creed.” It was upheld by the church and enforced by the Emperor – who favored the Arian position, by the way. The bishops voted to make the full deity of Christ the accepted position of the church, thus rejecting the Arian heresy.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3802.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Hale: to cause to do something through pressure or necessity, by physical, moral or intellectual means (*coerced*).

## 5. Heresies Refuted by Creeds and Councils

The creed states that the Father and the Son are “of the same substance.” This formula improved upon several earlier “creeds.” The earliest creed is the following:

I believe in God, the Father, the Almighty; And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, Our Lord, And in the Holy Ghost, the holy church, the resurrection of the flesh.<sup>11</sup>

Toward the end of the 2nd century we find this version. The additions are underlined:

I believe in God the Father, Almighty; And in Jesus Christ his only begotten Son, Our Lord, Who was born of the Holy Ghost, and the Virgin Mary, Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried; On the third day he rose from the dead, ascended in heaven, sat down at the right hand of the Father; From whence he will come to judge the living and the dead; And in the Holy Ghost, the holy church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh.

The original Eastern Trinitarian formula attempted to distinguish the first and second persons of the Godhead this way:

I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, of whom everything is, And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, through whom everything is, And in the Holy Ghost.<sup>12</sup>

At Nicea, EUSEBIUS of Caesarea (the church historian) presented the more comprehensive creed used at his own church. It was received with delight. Notice the plural *we*:

**We** believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, both visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God from God, light from light, life from life, the only-begotten Son, the first-born of all creation, begotten of the Father before all ages, by whom also all things were made; who for our salvation was made flesh, and lived among men, and suffered, and rose again the third day, and ascended to the Father, and shall come again in glory, to judge quick and dead; And in the Holy Spirit.

Several of the Caesarean phrases seemed to favor the opinions which the bishops had agreed to condemn. ‘First-born of all creation’ does not necessarily mean more than that he existed before other things were made. ‘Begotten before all worlds’ is just as ambiguous, or rather worse, for the Arians understood *begotten* to mean *created*. Again, ‘was made flesh’ left it unsettled whether the Lord took anything more than a human body. These were serious defects, and the bishops could not refuse to amend them. After much careful work, the following was the form adopted (differences are underlined):

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, both visible and invisible; And one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, an only-begotten — that is, from the essence (ousia) of the Father — God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, being of one essence (homoousion) with the Father; by whom all things were made, both things in heaven and things on earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, was made man, suffered, and rose again the third day, ascended into heaven, comes to judge quick and dead; And in the Holy Spirit.

The delegates added a *postscript*, to directly condemn the Arian heresy:

But those who say that ‘there was once when he was not,’ and ‘before he was begotten he was not,’ and ‘he was made of things that were not,’ or maintain that the Son of God is of a different

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<sup>11</sup> Lohse, Bernhard *A Short History of Christian Doctrine* (Fortress, Phila., 1978). p. 33. H.M. Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy* (Anson D. F. Randolph & Co., New York, 1908), pp. 14-15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 34.

## 5. Heresies Refuted by Creeds and Councils

essence (*hypostasis* or *ousia*)<sup>13</sup> or is created or subject to moral change or alteration, these the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematize.

*From the essence* makes a clear distinction: *of one essence* lays stress on the unity. The word had a Sabellian history, and was used by Marcellus in a Sabellian sense, so that it was justly discredited as Sabellian. Had it stood alone, the creed would have been Sabellian; but at Nicea it was checked by *from the essence*. When the later Nicenes, under Semi-Arian influence, came to give the word another meaning, the check was wisely removed.<sup>14</sup>

However, in 335 Arius was reinstated, and his *heresy* became *orthodoxy*. Athanasius, who had fought so hard for the divinity of Christ as orthodoxy, was then declared the heretic, and banished. These two camps went back in forth in favor. Athanasius was banished four times before Arianism was finally defeated in 451, at Chalcedon.

### **381 – 2nd Council at Constantinople – Against Apollinaris**

It adopted what we now know as the **NICENE CREED**. It affirmed and developed the creed promulgated at the Council of Nicaea in 325. They declared that Jesus Christ has a human soul *and* mind (he is truly man). This refuted Apollinaris' claim that Jesus had a human body and soul, but a *divine* mind or spirit. That was condemned as *Sabellianism* (modalism), which confounds the persons of the Godhead. The Council also declared the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son.

### **390 – Apostles' Creed Altered**

The phrase "he descended into hell" was a late addition to the Apostles' Creed. It first appeared in the CREED OF AQUILEIA, preserved by a monk named Rufinus, c. 390. The Athanasian Creed, which also contains the phrase, may not have been written until the time of Charlemagne (8th century). So, why the addition? One possible explanation is that at the end of the fourth century (around A.D. 381) the church was battling the teachings of Apollinaris. He taught that Jesus was not fully human – He had a human body and soul, but a divine spirit. The church, on the other hand, taught that Jesus had to be fully human for His death to be a true death and an effective sacrifice for sin. To demonstrate that Jesus was fully human, with a human spirit, the church may have added the Latin phrase from the *Creed of Aquileia* to the more popular *Apostles' Creed*. By the Middle Ages, the words *Hell* (the place of eternal torment) and *Hades* (the resting place of the dead) had become confused; Jesus was thought to have descended into Hell.

### **398 – 4th General Council at Carthage – Canon of NT**

Aside from prohibiting "laymen" from preaching without permission, the council fixed the canon of the NT at 27 books of Scripture, plus several apocrypha as historical texts.

### **411 – Council at Carthage – Against Pelagianism**

Celestius, who was the most prominent follower of Pelagius at the time, was condemned at the Council of Carthage in 411 because he denied the transmission of Adam's sins to his descendants. They also defeated Donatism, asserting that the churches of N. Africa were under the pope at Rome. Augustine began to write and preach against Pelagius' and

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<sup>13</sup> The two words are used as synonyms.

<sup>14</sup> *Anathematize*: to curse and subject to divine punishment – to declare *apostate*.

## 5. Heresies Refuted by Creeds and Councils

Celestius' doctrines. Pelagius and Celestius were condemned at two councils at Carthage and Milevis (Numidia, North Africa) in 416. Innocent I (410-17) excommunicated them from the church. On May 1, 418 the Council of Carthage convened to issue a series of nine canons affirming without compromise the Augustinian doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin. Emperor Honorius (395-423) issued an imperial decree denouncing the teachings of Pelagius and Celestius in that same year.

### **431 – Council at Ephesus – Against Semi-Pelagianism**

Celestius and Julian of Eclanum (ca. 386-454) debated Augustine until his death in 430. Pelagianism was condemned *again* at the Council of Ephesus in 431. After Pelagianism was officially condemned, it continued to thrive in small sects within the orthodox body of Christ. Some believed that Pelagianism was a heresy, *but* they did not agree fully with Augustinian Soteriology. These "Semi-Pelagians" as they were called, rejected Augustine's doctrines of predestination and irresistible grace. They thought that these two doctrines denied human responsibility, or man's freewill. The **SEMI-PELAGIANS** thought that if one held to Augustine's view of free will (being in bondage to sin), then this would undermine the monastic and missionary vision of the Church. The problem with Semi-Pelagianism is that they can accept *some* aspects of God's sovereignty and his purpose over his world, but they cannot accept *all* aspects of it, especially as pertains to man's salvation.

### **447 – Council of Toledo – Filioque: “and the Son”**

This council added what is known as the FILIOQUE clause ('and the Son') to the Nicene Creed of 381. This has been the subject of great controversy between Eastern Orthodox and Western Christianity. The Latin term *Filioque* describes the Holy Spirit as proceeding from both the Father and the Son (and not from the Father only). "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son). Who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified". ('descended into hell')

### **449 – 2nd Council of Ephesus – Pro-Monophysites**

The Monophysites did not recognize the dual nature of Christ. Instead, they taught he has only one nature – hence “mono.” They won the day at this particular council. The COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON later disagreed, which gave rise to the MONOPHYSITE SCHISM. Attempts to reconcile the opposing parties, only gave rise to more schisms, and to teachings that were later condemned as heresy.

Both councils affirmed the doctrine of the hypostatic union (the Nicean formula that the Father and the Son are *of the same substance*), and they upheld the orthodox doctrine that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully Man. However, the Second Council of Ephesus decreed St Cyril of Alexandria's formula that Christ is **one** incarnate nature (a union of divinity and humanity), that is fully human and fully God, united without separation, without confusion, without mixture, and without alteration. The Council of Chalcedon decreed that **two** natures exist in Christ, "a divine nature **and** a human nature, united in one person, with neither division nor confusion."

If that sounds like splitting hairs, it is. But *neither* side wanted to assign to Christ a nature different from the Father, nor different from mankind. If his divinity and humanity were thought of as fused or melded together, then he would be different from both God the Father, and from the rest of mankind. He would be neither God nor man. He could neither

## 5. Heresies Refuted by Creeds and Councils

represent us to God, in his human nature; nor could he represent God to us, in his divine nature. Now, how should that truth be worded? That's what created the schism.

Here is the error of MONOPHYSITISM (see chapter 3, p. 16). If Jesus is at once divine and human, without distinction between the two, then a number of Scripture verses make little sense. Who did Jesus pray to in the Garden, and submit his will to, if his divine and human nature cannot be distinguished? (Luk 22.42) And if they can't be distinguished, then why would he say in Mat 24.36, that he didn't know when those events would take place? "Only the Father knows." It must be that on some occasions he speaks and acts from his divine nature, all-knowing and all-powerful; on other occasions, he chooses to limit his divine nature, and to express himself fully in his human nature.

This is described in Phi 2.6, "Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to." (NLT) And therefore he cried out on the cross, "'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mat 27:46 <sup>NKJ</sup>) The word "forsaken" is to abandon, desert, or leave behind – his divinity was set aside in that moment, that he might die on our behalf. For otherwise, as God incarnate, he is the source of life itself and cannot die.

If both natures are fused into one, as the Monophysites claimed, then there is no way to release one nature from the other, nor to speak or act out of one, and apart from the other. This is a *mystery*; and yet the Scripture seems sufficiently clear that Christ indeed has a dual but indivisible nature. The Council at Chalcedon put that truth into words.

### 451 – Council at Chalcedon – Against ARIANISM.

... our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son, the same perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a rational soul and body, consubstantial with the Father in Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us in manhood, like us in all things except sin; begotten from the Father before the ages as regards his Godhead, and in the last days, the same, because of us and because of our salvation, begotten from the Virgin Mary, the *theotokos*, as regards his manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, made known in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures being by no means removed because of the union, but the property of each nature preserved and coalescing in one *prosopon* and one *hupostasis* – not parted or divided into two *prosopa*, but one and the same Son, only begotten, Divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets of old and Jesus Christ Himself have taught us about Him and the creed of our fathers has handed down.<sup>15</sup>

In these initial statements of faith, we find a renunciation of ARIAN teachings and a rejection of the teachings of those who described Christ as less than or more than human in his sufferings on the cross (his DUAL NATURE – *truly God and truly Man*), a rejection of MODALISM, a rejection of POLYTHEISM in any form, a rejection of any teaching that Christ was less than God incarnate, an affirmation of the RESURRECTION, a refutation that Christ did not die or rise from the dead, an affirmation of Christ's VIRGIN BIRTH, an affirmation of the SECOND COMING of Christ, of a DAY OF JUDGMENT, and a declaration that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was an ATONING SACRIFICE to pay for our sin (called *forensic* or *substitutionary atonement* – the payment of a debt by a surety). And the *postscript* to the Nicene Creed makes it abundantly clear that they considered such false teachings to be *apostate* (outside the faith) and not merely *heretical* (outside church doctrine).

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<sup>15</sup> Lohse, pp. 52-53.

**529 – Council of Orange – Against PELAGIANISM.**

The Council of Orange was an outgrowth of the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius. It had to do with the degree to which a human being is responsible for his or her own salvation, and the role of God's grace in bringing about salvation. The Pelagians held that human beings are born in a state of innocence, i.e., that there is no such thing as a sinful nature or original sin.

As a result, they held that a state of sinless perfection was achievable in this life. The Council of Orange dealt with the **SEMI-PELAGIAN** doctrine that the human race, though fallen and possessed of a sinful nature, is still "good" enough to be able to lay hold of the grace of God through an act of unredeemed human will. Here is the conclusion reached by this Council:

CONCLUSION. And thus according to the passages of holy scripture quoted above or the interpretations of the ancient Fathers we must, under the blessing of God, preach and believe as follows. The sin of the first man has so impaired and weakened free will that no one thereafter can either love God as he ought or believe in God or do good for God's sake, unless the grace of divine mercy has preceded him. We therefore believe that the glorious faith which was given to Abel the righteous, and Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and to all the saints of old, and which the Apostle Paul commends in extolling them (Heb. 11), was not given through natural goodness as it was before to Adam, but was bestowed by the grace of God. And we know and also believe that even after the coming of our Lord this grace is not to be found in the free will of all who desire to be baptized, but is bestowed by the kindness of Christ, as has already been frequently stated and as the Apostle Paul declares, "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake" (Phil. 1:29). And again, "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). And again, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and it is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). And as the Apostle says of himself, "I have obtained mercy to be faithful" (1 Cor. 7:25, cf. 1 Tim. 1:13). He did not say, "because I was faithful," but "to be faithful." And again, "What have you that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). And again, "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (Jas. 1:17). And again, "No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven" (John 3:27). There are innumerable passages of holy scripture which can be quoted to prove the case for grace, but they have been omitted for the sake of brevity, because further examples will not really be of use where few are deemed sufficient.

According to the catholic faith we also believe that after grace has been received through baptism, all baptized persons have the ability and responsibility, if they desire to labor faithfully, to perform with the aid and cooperation of Christ what is of essential importance in regard to the salvation of their soul. We not only do not believe that any are foreordained to evil by the power of God, but even state with utter abhorrence that if there are those who want to believe so evil a thing, *they are anathema*. We also believe and confess to our benefit that in every good work it is not we who take the initiative and are then assisted through the mercy of God, but God himself first inspires in us both faith in him and love for him without any previous good works of our own that deserve reward, so that we may both faithfully seek the sacrament of baptism, and after baptism be able by his help to do what is pleasing to him. We must therefore most evidently believe that the praiseworthy faith of the thief whom the Lord called to his home in paradise, and of Cornelius the centurion, to whom the angel of the Lord was sent, and of Zacchaeus, who was worthy to receive the Lord himself, was not a natural endowment but a gift of God's kindness.



## 5. Heresies Refuted by Creeds and Councils

### **1215 – 4th Lateran Council – Against the Waldenses**

The fourth Lateran Council, generally considered the greatest council before Trent, was years in preparation. Pope Innocent III convened it, and more than 400 bishops, 800 abbots and priors, envoys of many European kings, and personal representatives of Frederick II took part. Frederick was confirmed by the council as emperor of the West. The purpose of the council was twofold: REFORM OF THE CHURCH and the RECOVERY OF THE HOLY LAND. The council ruled on the use of church property, tithes, judicial procedures, and patriarchal precedence. It ordered Jews and Saracens to wear distinctive dress. It obliged Catholics to make a yearly confession and to receive Communion during the Easter season. The council sanctioned the word “**TRANSUBSTANTIATION**” as a correct expression of eucharistic doctrine. The teachings of the *Waldenses* were condemned (e.g., preaching and praying in the local language). Innocent also ordered a four-year truce among Christian rulers so that a new **CRUSADE** could be launched.

### **1415 – Council of Constance – Against Hus & Wyclif**

The council ended the Western Schism by either deposing the remaining papal claimants, or accepting their resignation, and by electing Pope Martin V. The council also condemned Jan Hus and John Wycliffe as heretics, allowing Hus’s execution by the civil authority. That was a declaration that Wycliffe’s teachings were heretical.

### **1545 - Council of Trent – Against Protestants**

The Council of Trent was the 19th ecumenical council of the **ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH**. It was held in three parts from 1545 to 1563. Prompted by the Reformation, the Council made sweeping reforms and clarified virtually every doctrine contested by the Protestants. Despite internal strife and two lengthy interruptions, the council was a key part of the Counter-Reformation, and it revitalized the Roman Catholic Church in both doctrine and practice.

The council in 1545-1547 accepted the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed as the basis of Catholic faith; the canon of New and Old Testament books was fixed; it declared several historical books to be Scripture, in order to justify their practices; tradition was accepted as a source of faith; the Latin Vulgate was declared adequate for doctrinal proofs; the number of sacraments was fixed at seven; and the nature and consequences of original sin were defined. After months of intense debate, the council ruled against Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith alone. Man, the council said, was inwardly justified by *cooperating* with the divine grace that God bestows gratuitously.

In 1551-1552, concerning the Eucharist, the Council defined the **REAL PRESENCE** of Christ in opposition to the interpretation of Huldrych Zwingli, the Swiss Reformation leader. It upheld the doctrine of **TRANSUBSTANTIATION** (from the 4th Lateran Council) in opposition to Luther’s **CONSUBSTANTIATION**. The sacrament of penance was extensively defined, extreme unction explained (later, the anointing of the sick), and decrees were issued on episcopal jurisdiction and clerical discipline.

In 1562-1563, the Council declared that Christ is entirely present in both the consecrated bread and the consecrated wine in the Eucharist. But it left to the pope the practical decision of whether or not the chalice should be granted to the laity. It defined the mass as a true sacrifice; issued doctrinal statements on holy orders, matrimony, purgatory,

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indulgences, and the veneration of saints, images, and relics; and enacted reform decrees on clerical morals, and the establishment of seminaries.

Shortly afterward, the catechism of Trent appeared, the missal and breviary were revised, and a revised version of the Bible was published. By the end of the 16th century, many of the abuses that had motivated the Protestant Reformation had disappeared, and the Roman Catholic Church had reclaimed many of its followers in Europe. The council, however, failed to heal the schism that had split the Western Christian church.

### **1618 – Canons of Dordt – Against ARMINIANISM.**

Jacobus Arminius questioned the teaching of Calvin and his followers on a number of important points. After Arminius' death, his own followers presented their views on five of these points in the *Remonstrance of 1610* (see chapter 4). The Arminians taught election based on foreseen faith, universal atonement, partial depravity, resistible grace, and the possibility of a lapse from grace. In the *Canons* the Synod of Dordt rejected these views and set forth the Reformed doctrine on these points, namely, **Total** depravity, **Unconditional** election, **Limited** (or particular) atonement, **Irresistible** grace, and the **Perseverance** of saints – the acronym TULIP.

We dealt with this Synod in chapter 1; it isn't necessary to review it here. But the original preface to the Canons called it a "judgment, in which both the true view, agreeing with God's Word, concerning the aforesaid five points of doctrine is explained, and the false view, disagreeing with God's Word, is rejected." Here is the Synod's conclusion:

And so this is the clear, simple, and straightforward explanation of the orthodox teaching on the five articles in dispute in the Netherlands, as well as the rejection of the errors by which the Dutch churches have for some time been disturbed. This explanation and rejection the Synod declares to be derived from God's Word and in agreement with the confessions of the Reformed churches. Hence it clearly appears that those of whom one could hardly expect it, have shown no truth, equity, and charity at all in wishing to make the public believe [that reformed doctrine is pernicious and misleading].

Therefore this Synod of Dordt, in the name of the Lord, pleads with all who devoutly call on the name of our Savior Jesus Christ to form their judgment about the faith of the Reformed churches, not on the basis of false accusations gathered from here or there, or even on the basis of the personal statements of a number of ancient and modern authorities— statements which are also often either quoted out of context or misquoted and twisted to convey a different meaning— but on the basis of the churches' own official confessions and of the present explanation of the orthodox teaching which has been endorsed by the unanimous consent of the members of the whole Synod, one and all.

## 5. Heresies Refuted by Creeds and Councils

## 6. SECULAR REACTION TO CHRISTENDOM

For a millennium, the church of *Christendom* — under Roman Catholicism and the Holy Roman Empire — was a *political* order. It invaded the domain of the state in order to wield the sword of the state (Rom 13.4). It used the state's power to achieve its earthly ends, and it also accumulated its own power and money — even armies — to lord it over the nations.

When Protestantism severed itself from Rome, it favored worldly princes and turned to them for protection. But when Protestantism splintered into national churches, and then into myriad denominations and independent churches, it again became a target. Kings and princes of the western world, having been freed from their bondage to Rome, sought to exercise the sort of authority over their people, *and* their churches, that Rome had exercised over them. The consequences for the churches of Europe were dire. But in America, separating church from state provided a period of what the churches thought would be “safety.” The church *insulated* itself from the state.

In time, however, lacking cohesive power and a coherent voice, the church became *excluded* from the state, and then from the culture. It was not a victim in this. Rather, by its actions and inactions, the church insulated *itself* from both spheres. However, that didn't keep the world from finding its way into the Church.

### ***Secular Influences on the Church***

This chapter covers worldviews that are *outside the Christian Faith*, and therefore are not technically heresies. However, they have had immense influence on the Church and its doctrine. As with heresies, we need to be sensitive to such influences, and guard against them just as intently as we guard against heresies by those who claim to be “Christian.”

We've seen in Constantine's reign during the early 300s, and in Gregory I's reign in the early 600s, how the ideas, traditions, and cultural norms of their day became part of the orthodoxy of the Church. Well, in our day too, ideas and cultural norms may influence our understanding of Scripture, and color our doctrine. We need to be familiar with other worldviews, to distinguish them from our own. We must recognize when something other than Scripture influences our doctrine, so that we guard what's been entrusted to us.

**THE ENLIGHTENMENT** — Scholasticism and the Reformation had opened the door to philosophy and institutional change for the West. Once that door was opened, the *Age of Reason* dawned. It held to the supremacy of the human mind over myth, superstition, and revelation. The world divided into 3 groups in the 1600's:

- **Traditionalists** who clung to their Catholic religious heritage;
- **Reformists** who opposed more than they upheld, and so they were labelled “protestants”
- **Separatists** who rejected God altogether in favor of humanism and human reason.

It is this third group (*Separatists*) that the Enlightenment or **MODERNITY** sprung from. Its assumptions are:

1. Human Autonomy - meaning and morality can be discovered within the bounds of natural reason without any reference to God.
2. Inevitable Progress - every day, in every way, we're getting better and better.
3. Knowledge is *always* good, and therefore must be obtained at any cost

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4. Knowledge results in control over our environment, which is our salvation
5. Righteousness is found in developing and enforcing social and political solutions

**SECULARISM** – This worldview asserts that there are two spheres of human activity: one is public and secular; the other is private and religious. Secularism demands that religion remain in the private sphere. The Church, it says, should play no role in the public sphere, have no voice in the marketplace of ideas, and be excluded from education. Now, one might hope that secularism would also demand that the public sphere not control the content of the private sphere. But that has not been the case. The Enlightenment led to a secular science that intentionally excluded God from its investigations. It equated faith with irrationalism. Secular scientists presume that God does not exist, because He cannot be “proved” by the scientific method.

For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Rom 1:20-21)

Having excluded religion from science, secularists created a religion of science. Many Christians have been persuaded by secularists that the Gospel doesn’t belong in the public square, and that religion is a private matter. Consequently, ***secularism is a heresy***.

**SCIENTISM** – As enlightenment ideals advanced, science was no longer just a technique or a means to acquire accurate knowledge about God’s creation. It became the altar on which mankind places its sacrifices of time, money, study, and devotion. It claims to be the means of our salvation and survival, the only standard of truth and light in a world of darkness. Its *priests* are the *scientists* who dispense the godless truth they serve, to an allegedly witless, ignorant, and superstitious generation. Science, they believe, is the *cure* for God, and so it becomes the religion of scientism. It is *atheistic* science. In rejecting the God of Scripture as a fiction, ***scientism is a heresy***.

**PUBLIC EDUCATION** – Through public education systems, advocated by Napoleon and other modern tyrants, modern societies devoted their children to the service of science. In many ways, a broad-based standardized education system was beneficial; it furthered scientific and technological advances on a large scale. There is no inherent evil in public education – it’s a neutral means. Horace Mann, who founded public education in America in 1837, believed that the purpose of public education is to build character, and to prevent tyranny by providing an educated electorate. Knowledge was the means by which to do it. He was challenged by the proliferation of Christian factions, each wanting educational doctrine and practice to match their own.<sup>16</sup> The choice became whether to promote Christian nominalism, or exclude religion altogether.

In the 1940s, John Dewey (co-author of the Humanist Manifesto), was given charge of public education in America. Over the next thirty years, school curricula became limited; teachers’ colleges became more standardized. Christianity was either excluded from course content, characterized as mythology, or rejected as “absolute truth.” In a pluralistic society, and in a public school, one religion could not be favored over another as a matter of public policy. This is more than SECULARISM. It is PANTHEISM, and ***it is heresy***.

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<sup>16</sup> Horace Mann *On The Crisis In Education*, ed. Louis Filler, University Press of America, 1965.

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**SOCIAL ENGINEERING** – With the rise of secular states, the separation of church and state,<sup>17</sup> and widespread public education, cultural values may now be instilled by the state, not just by the church. Public education played a role in that, not because it was public, but because it was centralized, and because government can control the curricula. From its original mission to protect against tyranny, it became the very means of *government* indoctrination – and of *elitist* indoctrination (a type of secular MONASTICISM). It can effect changes in social norms in a single generation, aided by media populated with graduates of the public education system. Witness how quickly the LGBT movement became socially acceptable, and how any opposition was labelled “hate speech.” A small group of lobbyists can influence curricula through the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>18</sup> They influence what teachers’ colleges instill in public school teachers. This goes beyond scholastic content. Such power unavoidably impacts our religious liberty. It influences the values, beliefs, and practices of those attending our churches, often contradicting church orthodoxy. In those instances, ***social engineering is a heresy***, and its teachers are false prophets.

Science is no longer limited to the physical sciences, or technical fields. It has branched out to include history, philosophy, psychology, education, and sociology. Its teachings are promoted through our public schools, universities, and mass media. HERESY is defined by scientists as whatever contradicts current *scientific orthodoxy*. There is no sin, only misperception. There is no absolute truth apart from what scientists declare it to be. In social and medical sciences, the opinions of scientists trump all other opinions. Their testimony is considered “expert” in any court in the land. But the testimony of a Christian about right relationships, founded on the biblical text instead of an authorized textbook, is a fiction, an unlicensed intrusion into the protected and sanctioned territory of Science. Science claims it is the arbiter of truth. It is the CIVIL RELIGION of our time.

**DARWINISM** – going beyond the teachings of Charles Darwin and Science, Darwinism defines a mechanistic universe in which there can be no God. The mechanism is God: it is impersonal and indifferent. Like PELAGIANISM, mankind is evolving ever better with each generation, without a corrupt nature, capable of being educated out of its “sickness” and selfishness. Man is not at all dead in his sin. Nor is he unique in his divinity (he is not made in the image of God). He is just another creature on the planet with no more rights, privileges, or superiority than a cockroach might have. ***Darwinism is heresy***.

**CULTISM** – In the early 1800s, there was a tremendous rise in cults. Mainstream or “orthodox religion” was supplanted by science and technology. Into the religious vacuum surged the following cults and sects, all in a mere half-century, from 1827 to 1883:

Plymouth Brethren and Dispensationalism (John Darby), Mormonism (Joseph Smith), the Oxford Movement in England (Keble), the Holiness Movement (Mahan), Higher Criticism and dawn of Liberalism (Schleiermacher), Millerism, Christian Existentialism (Kierkegaard), Marxism, Perfectionist Movement, Immaculate Conception, Darwinism, and Seventh-Day Adventists (Ellen White). Nietzsche’s *Superman* is born of Darwinism; The ideas of *Superman* lead to Hitler, Planned Parenthood, and Genetic engineering.

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<sup>17</sup> This is a European as well as an American standard. The only exception is in Muslim nations.

<sup>18</sup> Created in 1980, “ED” had an annual budget of \$68 billion in 2016, and just under 4,000 employees in 2018.

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**POST-MODERNISM** – After World Wars I and II, and the atrocities of the last century, it became clear that the ideals of the Enlightenment were false. But now we're told that there's no such thing as truth or progress, at all. Instead, truth is relative, subjective, limited, and transitory. Life is to be lived in the private sphere. We are connected to others only through public spheres, such as job, school, and politics. In the public sphere, we must not impose our views on others (see *Secularism* above). All views are equally valid. The only shared truth we have is vicarious. Its images are conveyed to us through television and other media. These provide us with our image of reality, ala George Orwell's *1984*, or Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. And yet we strive to don that publicly projected and acceptable image by adorning ourselves with its icons: the right clothing, makeup, consumables, homes, cars, etc. We are driven to conform this way in order to gain acceptance, to participate in that larger community. The images have been designed by folks who are unknown, unelected, and unaccountable to us, who themselves are at the mercy of corporate employers and Stockholders. They pander to whatever draws our attention, such as sex, violence, and greed. The source of culture, the values of our community, have been so splintered that there is no longer a standard of right and wrong, biblical or otherwise. Biblical truth is hidden amidst the trees in a forest filled with opposing truths. People are searching for their own personal path to bliss. After all, *there are many roads to heaven*.

### Old Heresies Re-packaged

MARCION simply threw out those parts of Scripture he believed to be corrupted. Today, the liberal critics do essentially the same thing when they attempt to separate the "authentic sayings of Jesus" from the sayings His disciples supposedly put on His lips. Of course, the critics' edits are based on their own preconceived notions, including their tendency to rule out the existence of the supernatural. Thus, neither Christ's miracles nor His resurrection could have occurred.

But softer forms of Marcionism have also appeared in modern times. Many hyper-dispensationalists accept the Old and New Testaments, but they divide the contents of Scripture in such a way as to make only a small part of it applicable to Christians. They establish a radical discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments and between Israel and the church. Some go so far as to declare that only certain of Paul's writings pertain to Christians today.

We also see softer forms of ANTINOMIANISM today. The "once saved, always saved" advocates do not deliberately encourage sinful behavior, but their teaching that sinful behavior on the part of a true Christian can never sever his relationship with God is, nevertheless, a form of antinomianism.

A form of antinomianism is also seen in the view that the believer now relies completely on the influence and promptings of the Holy Spirit, and has no need of biblical law to inform him on godly behavior (Quakerism). This view resembles yet another form of antinomianism—the view that replaces biblical commandments with the sentiment of "love." The result is that sentiment (often called "love") takes precedence over the plain commandments of God, resulting in "justification" for all kinds of immoral behavior—couples living together as if married, gay marriage, and euthanasia. Even a pro-abortion ("pro-choice") stance is seen as "loving," because it is opposed to those mean old Bible-thumping "fundamentalists" who oppose "reproductive rights" and "choice."

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And then there are the modern MODALISTS who, like the modalists of old, make God a solitary Person who operates through three modes; the modern ARIANS and ADOPTIONISTS, who strip Christ of His full divinity and make Him a part of creation; the modern MONTANISTS, noted for their emphasis on ecstatic prophecy and ecstatic utterance, or “speaking in tongues;” the modern GNOSTICS, who blend Christian beliefs with New Age spirituality; and on it goes...

### **An Old Admonition—Still Good for Today**

There can be no doubt that the Christianity that has come down to us was in many ways shaped by the torrent of heresies, cultural influences, and theological disputes that have come and gone over the centuries. But—make no mistake—yesterday’s heresies never really went away. They have simply been brushed up a bit and repackaged—but they’re still with us. For this reason, the people of God today would do well to heed an old—but not outdated—admonition:

“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to *contend earnestly* for the faith which was once delivered to the saints” (**Jude 1:3**)

<http://cgi.org/heresies-ancient-and-modern/>

**The EMERGENT CHURCH MOVEMENT** is essentially POSTMODERNISM, desiring to set aside established doctrine, in order to “rediscover” it afresh, without the bias of tradition. But in the re-examination of what’s been received, old heresies can be reborn, and new heresies created. “Guard what has been entrusted to you.” (1Tim 6.20)

**LIBERATION THEOLOGY.** One type of this theology is nothing more than “christian Marxism,” with Jesus Christ as a political and economic activist. It seeks worldly solutions to a spiritual disease, and its promised cure is therefore an earthly cure: temporary, corrupted, and inadequate. It may seek to overthrow tyranny by force, only to install Marxist tyranny in its place. It justifies it under a principle of biblical justice, where the liberators serve as the right hand of God. Another type imitates the SOCIAL GOSPEL of Liberalism. It pursues social, moral, political, and economic justice, with the church advocating for the poor and afflicted in society. Tied to this we may find advocacy for feminism, gay rights, immigrants, migrant workers, etc. Jeremy Jackson writes,

Universalism is closely tied to social justice... For if society is the supreme value, the idea of any unit of society being damned is unthinkable. Hence, modern justice is reluctant to punish criminals; it prefers to think in terms of therapy. After all, there must be something wrong with a unit of society attacking society; analysis and treatment is called for... Along with universalism goes the modern insistence that all religions are, at base, the same... Surely there are many ways to God, and to insist on just one is unreasonable.

**Response:** John 8:36, “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”; Gal 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (Joh 14:6)

**LIBERALISM.** J. Gresham Machen called Liberalism “another religion,” not Christianity. It seeks to reconcile Christianity with science, typically rejecting the resurrection, Christ’s virgin birth, and miracles. It raises pseudo-science (sociology, psychology, etc.) to the level of testable science, which may be reasoned by man’s mind alone. They are reserved



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to self-professed experts. Thus pastors must be licensed by the state to counsel members of their congregation with the truth of Scripture. Reason is the measure of truth and morality, while religion apart from reason is mythology, superstitious, and irrational. Liberalism rejects the authority of God, and the authority of Scripture. This is the Marcionites again. Liberalism opposes the historic creeds as suspect. It substitutes a life lived, for the biblical truth which governs that life. Man's reason, of course, is the domain solely of the intellectual elite, the GNOSTICS of our time, who will tell us what is true – for they claim to be the only ones who know it. It is a SOCIALIST system that limits individual liberty. Liberalism, like the early JUDAIZERS, teaches that salvation comes by belief in Christ, followed by works, and *then* by justification. It is works without wonder. It is obedience without submission.

**Response:** Isa 55.9, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."; Col 2.8, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."

**SOCIAL GOSPEL** – This was a movement led by a group of liberal Protestant progressives in response to the social problems raised by the rapid industrialization, urbanization, and increasing immigration of the Gilded Age (1870s-1910). The social gospel differentiated itself from earlier Christian reform movements by prioritizing social salvation over individual salvation. Although the ministers and activists of the social gospel based their appeals on LIBERAL THEOLOGY, which emphasized the immanence of God and the doctrine of Incarnation and valued good works over creeds, they usually showed more interest in social science than in theology. Believing that laissez-faire capitalism's understanding of labor as a commodity and its sole reliance on mechanisms of supply and demand to determine wages and allocate resources was un-Christian, social gospel advocates supported the labor movement and called for an interventionist welfare state. They differed from secular activists in that their ultimate vision was not just a more equitable balance of power within society, but a Christianized society in which cooperation, mutual respect, and compassion replaced greed, competition, and conflict among social and economic classes. Despite all of their efforts to reach the working class and to cooperate with the labor movement, though, the social gospel failed to reach far beyond its middle-class liberal Protestant milieu. Ultimately, the greatest achievement of the social gospel was to prepare the ground of middle-class America for progressivism [*political solutions*].

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3401803915.html>

**Response:** Mt. 10.37; Mk 14.7; Gal 6.10; 1Joh 2.15, 3.17; Jas 1.27.

**OPEN-THEISM** – Also known as "Openness of God," and "free-will theism." It comes from Clark H. Pinnock and his associates. The basic premise is that the traditional view of God as immutable, sovereign, and omniscient is seriously flawed. They believe that God's immutability is restricted to His character and ultimate plans. He did not "unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass" and He does not know "whatsoever may or can come to pass." He has chosen to limit himself with regards to His sovereignty and omniscience at creation, and has given man the freedom and power to choose his own destiny. Accordingly, they believe that what the Bible teaches about predestination concerns only final goals and purposes of God. What happens between is neither within God's control nor foreknowledge. God can be surprised by what happens! A believer reading the

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Scripture cannot arrive at such an anthropocentric conception of God, without pre-conceived notions of human autonomy and sovereignty. Thus, it is ancient PELAGIANISM wearing new clothes; it is LIBERALISM in disguise.

**Response:** Isa 46.10; Col 1.16-17; Rev 19.6.

**FUTURE GRACE or LORDSHIP SALVATION** adds works to faith in a supposedly biblical way: God's foreknowledge looks forward to our obedience, then God justifies us accordingly. This is a form of AMARYLDIANISM, and it's circular reasoning. It makes God dependent on our actions, before He will justify us.

**Response:** Joh 1. 13, We "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;" also Jo 3.3, 6: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." We cannot be born of the flesh by our own works, so as to be born of God by the Spirit. These are mutually exclusive states and conditions.

**AUBURN AVENUE or FEDERAL VISION theology.** One origin is the doctrine of justification by faith *and* works – an open, blatant, and unambiguous attack on justification by sovereign grace alone. This heresy was proposed by Norman Shepherd when he was a professor in WTS Phila., in the late Seventies and early Eighties. It finally ended in his resignation, but his views were never officially condemned. Westminster remains today a center for the propagation of the heresy.

Dr. Klaas Schilder contributed to Federal Vision with his view of a *conditional* covenant. The covenant of grace, in keeping with the notion of a covenant of works, was a pact or agreement between God and man that depended for its adoption and maintenance on a number of promises, conditions, and threats. It included the idea that all the children who were baptized were included in the covenant, and received the promise of God that they would be saved—but on condition that they would, in the future, accept the provisions of the covenant. The Federal Vision theology carries out conditional salvation to its extreme.

If the covenant is conditional, it is conditional because it is established with more people than are actually saved. And this is what the promoters of the Federal Vision maintain. Dr. Schilder taught that baptism was a sign and seal of the covenant, and that God therefore established His covenant with every baptized child. Dr. Schilder and his followers today are adamant about separating God's *electing determination* of His people, from the *covenant*. The men of the Federal Vision go beyond Schilder. They take the position that all born within covenant lines are elect — really, fully, completely. They are regenerated, converted, justified, and sanctified, and are objects of saving grace. This is a doctrine of justification by faith and works. That is Roman Catholic theology, c. 1517, which undoes the Reformation.

To adopt the views of the Federal Vision is to repudiate every one of the five points of Calvinism, points laid down carefully by the great Synod of Dordt. For a particular, sovereign, and efficacious decree of election, the defenders of the heresy of the Federal Theology opt for the damnable Arminian doctrine of a universal and conditional election. For the doctrine of total depravity, the Federal Vision people teach that man has a free will and can do works by his own power and the power of a free will. For particular redemption, we are now confronted with the age-old heresy of a universal atonement. If all baptized children have salvation in fact, this is because Christ died for them all. The

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church has fought for a particular atonement in vain if these views are accepted. Instead of irresistible grace, we are told that grace is resistible, for all baptized children receive grace, but some successfully resist it. And no longer can the believer find refuge in the doctrine of the preservation of the saints, for he may once have been elect, once regenerated, once justified; but he has no guarantee that he shall remain such. All hangs on his own obedience and good works. God's everlasting covenant of grace, the one unifying truth of the gospel and the over-arching doctrine of salvation, becomes a mere conditional agreement dependent on our faithfulness and willingness to fulfill the conditions of it.

**Response:** This is ARMINIANISM, refuted by the Canons of Dordt, Art. 9.

**NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PAUL** – Paul is unmistakably clear that *justification is by faith alone*. If Federal Vision and other works-based theologies are to be accepted, something must be done about Paul. And so what is called “A New Perspective on Paul” is promoted. The leading figure in this effort to get rid of Paul is a British theologian, N. T. Wright. He has invented the novel theory that Paul was not writing against justification by faith and works, but was rather combating a Jewish heresy that sought salvation in the works of the law. Paul's fierce denunciation of justification by faith and works, as well as his repeated insistence that justification is by faith alone, was simply a refutation of Jewish legalism. James in his epistle, Wright claims, sets the balance right when James tells us that both Abraham and Rahab were justified by works.

The new perspective on Paul is born out of a higher critical view of Scripture that is destructive of God's Word and insidiously deceptive. We reject its higher critical view as heresy. The way is paved for a return to Rome, something many Protestants have already done. If justification is not by faith alone, then the protestant churches can find no reason not to apologize to Rome for the sins of the sixteenth century, and to rush back into the embrace of the pope.

*Notes on Federal Vision and New Perspectives, are from two articles by Herman Hanko:*

<http://www.prca.org/resources/publications/articles/itemlist/tag/Federal%20Vision>  
<http://www.prca.org/resources/publications/articles/item/4116-modern-heresies-federal-vision-2>

## 7. SECULARISM INVADES THE CHURCH

In addition to repackaging old heresies, and the rise of the philosophical religions that we saw in chapters 5 and 6, there are fresh weeds growing in the Garden of God today:

The PROSPERITY GOSPEL (*materialism*), the HEALTH GOSPEL, a cult of ENTERTAINMENT, MEDIA-WORSHIP, SELF-WORSHIP, EMPEROR-WORSHIP (dictators, presidents, kings, etc.), CELEBRITY WORSHIP (religious and secular), and ESCAPISM (modern monasticism, drug abuse, fantasy games, mob-mentality, etc.). We need to ask, “What makes them popular?”

It appears that there’s an increasing drive either to be told what to think and do by others, or to tell others what to think and do – even with regard to Biblical truth. Private judgment isn’t as valued as it should be. The Internet and social media feed our frenzy to worship or be worshipped. Instead of taking responsibility for our thoughts, speech, and actions, there’s a tendency to follow celebrity pastors, create designer religions, accept fringe ideas, and pursue a private reality. The “me” generation (self-absorbed and anti-authoritarian) lives with the “me too” generation, which is submissive to a fault.

This makes our times ripe for tyranny and deception, where truth is what you make of it, and all “truths” are equally valid. Self-definition has arisen in gender politics, with a demand for adherence to elitist-defined ideals. Any disagreement with the elites of whichever faction yells the loudest, brings a charge of HERESY! The same groups who oppose religion, enforce their rules and ideals with a religious fervor that is virulent, and often violent. Social media panders to and fosters an irrational mob mentality.

Freedom of speech and religion are portrayed as hate speech and hate crimes. What was orthodox is now heretical, and heresy has become the new orthodoxy. It’s not about a political ideology, with a liberal “left” seeking change and liberty from the constraints of the past – versus a conservative “right” defending the old ways with entrenched power. What we’re seeing is more nihilistic (nothing matters), and anarchistic (tear it all down).

John Lennon’s song *Imagine* has captured the “imagination” of a disgusted and nihilistic generation – and many Christians! “Imagine there’s no heaven; It’s easy if you try; No hell below us; Above us only sky; Imagine all the people living for today; Imagine there’s no countries; It isn’t hard to do; Nothing to kill or die for; And no religion too.” They’ve made *that* their religion, and they can’t see the irony or idolatry of it. It’s MARXIST UTOPIANISM.

Many don’t *know* history, or *believe* it, because they’re convinced that history is written by those in power – that it doesn’t truthfully portray historical events or personalities. It may therefore be rewritten or reinterpreted however they like. So they’ve rewritten the history of the Church, turning it from liberty and justice under God, to bondage and injustice under men. Orthodoxy and Heresy, in their estimation, are equally repugnant. They’re convinced these are means to control and manipulate the minds and wills of others, not to serve them, nor to show them what true freedom looks like for *all*.

Christ is divorced from the Church in their minds, because that was so often done by the Church of CHRISTENDOM. Jesus then becomes a moral man, not a Savior of mankind; and the Church remains a villain. If we are to purify the Church, in its doctrines and practices, we must do it *publicly* – in the sight of God and men. We must be proclaimers and *doers* of God’s truth. We must beware of secularism invading the church. And we must be sure that what we define as heresy is based on God’s holy word, rightly interpreted.

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Most of mankind worships what's *within*, or what's *without*, but not what's *above*. Theirs is an ABC religion — Anything **B**ut Christ. Nothing has changed since the beginning. There is nothing new under the sun. The sinful nature that gave rise to the early heresies we studied, continues to give rise to modern heresies. There is a common theme, which is the rejection of God's plan of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone, who is truly God and truly man.

**VARIATIONS ON A THEME.** Some theologies modify the Gospel in such a way that, from a reformed perspective, they're not biblically sound. Yet they're still considered "Christian." It may look like Wesleyan Arminianism, in which our will plays a part in our justification. It may have attributes of the Holiness Movement, as if we don't need Christ after justification because we're sufficiently "cured" to be holy on our own. It may claim that we're born again by God's sovereign will, but we must *maintain* our salvation by our works. It may claim that someone has *new revelation*, as if the canon weren't closed. It may claim that someone has miraculous *gifts of healing*, for a price. It may claim to know when Christ will return, though He himself did not. Some of these are false prophets. Some are charlatans like Simon the Magician in Acts 8. Some are mistaken, or have been misled by others. All of these depart from the Gospel of grace.

### Name It and Claim It

This heresy has various forms, with various names, such as the *Word of Faith* movement, the *Prosperity Gospel*, or the *Wealth & Health Gospel*. But at its core, it is a rejection of God's sovereignty. It's a *doctrine of works*, and a form of **DIVINATION**. It is the belief that if we live right, and speak the right words, God is obligated to give us health, wealth, and prosperity. It says that we can speak things into existence, as if casting a spell. In 1983, Florence Bulle wrote a book titled, "God Wants You Rich, and Other Enticing Doctrines." The title reminds us that enticements don't come from God (Jas 1.13), but from the *enticer*, Satan – the tempter (Mat 4.3; 1Th 3.5). Satan tries to convince us that our fleshly desires are only natural, and should be gratified. Adversity is alleged to be foreign to the Christian life (yet Christ said we would have trouble in this world, Joh 16.33). Adversity must result from our sin, these proponents say, rather than God's sovereignty. If we're sinless, they surmise, there would be no adversity – but if that were possible, we would have no need for God's forgiveness, and no need for Christ's atoning sacrifice. You can see how these misrepresentations draw us away from the person and work of Christ.

The **PROSPERITY GOSPEL** is a gospel of *materialism*. God's purpose for you, it says, is to be indulged, happy, and rich as a sign of God's favor. It is a doctrine of works and of greed (Mat 23.25; Luk 12.15). It results in acquiring and taking, but not giving – except out of your excess (Luk 21.4). It rejects Christ as a man of sorrows, well-acquainted with grief (Isa 53.3). The Bible says we are to follow Christ, and serve others as we would serve him (Col 3.23) – giving food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, visiting the sick, housing the stranger, clothing the naked, and going to the prisoners (Mat 25.34-46). The Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head (Mat 8.20). But the Prosperity Gospel urges us to build mansions for ourselves. It's a declaration that the life to come is not more important than the life we have (1Tim 4.8). It rejects Christ's words that we be *in* the world but not *of* it (Joh 17.11-16); that we be sojourners and pilgrims on earth, not worldly citizens (Eph 2.19; 1Pet 2.11); that we not love the world or anything in it, for the love of the Father would not be in us (1Joh 2.15). ***The Prosperity Gospel is therefore heresy.***

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The **HEALTH GOSPEL** is akin to the *Prosperity Gospel*. It demands physical health as a right, or an earthly reward for faith. If we're afflicted with paralysis, blindness, deafness, or disease, it said to be our lack of faith. It's our fault, not God's providence. We shouldn't accept it, as Paul accepted his thorn (2Cor 12.7-9). Therefore, come to this self-proclaimed healer and prophet, and let him relieve your suffering. He says, "Praise God," only to mask his lust for glory. This was the sin of Simon Magus in Acts 8.18, who wanted to wield the power of the Holy Spirit for personal gain. These "healers" tempt the afflicted person to believe they can purchase God's grace, or receive it from a man instead of God.

But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent... for I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." (Act 8:20-23)

Adherents of this heresy say that Job was mistaken when he said, "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away" (Job 1.21) He should have said, "The Lord gives, SATAN takes away." This is a *false* gospel. It is a doctrine of *works*. It is DUALISM. It is *idolatry*. It is *poison*. And for those reasons, **it is heresy**.

***But is it wrong to want financial security and physical health?*** Is it wrong to avoid adversity if possible? No, it isn't. The *love* of money is the root of all evil, not money itself. Being prudent is wise (Pro 16.21), and spending less than we earn is prudent. Seeking medical help when we're sick is prudent. Asking God to cure our sickness is prudent. That request may not be fulfilled as we want it, when we want it, but it doesn't mean we don't ask. Paul asked God to remove the thorn, but he was content that it remain. It becomes **sin** when we *demand* it of God. And it becomes *heresy* when someone claims to have the gift of healing (1Cor 12.9) — as if the cure is from *them*, and not from our heavenly Father. Christ never made such a claim. He said time and again, "Your faith has healed you." (Mat 9.22; 15.28; Mk 10.52; see also Act 3.16; 14.9) But faith is no guarantee of ease. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (Joh 16:33)

These distinctions indicate the point at which a desire to avoid poverty and disease goes beyond the permissible, and embraces a false belief. Cessationism (the doctrine that miraculous gifts ended with the first generation of believers) doesn't mean that healing itself ended, or that God's word is not proclaimed with power today. The Holy Spirit is as active today as He was in the first century, continuing to bring about the Father's will, just as He did at creation — and just as He will until the Judgment.

But with regard to the gifts and operations of the Spirit today, there are those who would twist God's truth for personal gain. They bend God's promises, and offer a false gospel, with false hope, and claim there will be earthly rewards for obedience, tacked onto glory to God. It confuses our motivations for obedience. Are we obedient to be rewarded, or are we obedient to bring glory to God, born of thanksgiving for what Christ has done?

Faith healers have always been notorious for their chicanery and deceptions. And yet believers still fall prey to their lies. How can that be? Perhaps it's out of desperation. We'll believe whoever promises a means to end our present suffering. Certainly politicians are prone to promise what they can't deliver. But when it comes to spiritual deception, our soul is at risk, and our testimony of faith in Christ can be compromised by this heresy.

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***Every heresy begins with a distortion of God's word.*** That's where Satan began his deception in the Garden. He asked: "Did God *really* say...?" (Gen 3.1) Faith healers and Word of Faith preachers begin by distorting the person and work of Christ. They shift the object of our faith from Christ alone, to include themselves, or *ourselves*. They change the definition of salvation to include deliverance from adversity in this life. *That's a different Gospel*. This salvation comes by faith in Christ *plus* our own words and actions. That's ARIANISM. That heresy likewise began with a distortion of the truth of God's word concerning the person and work of Christ.

Because the **WORD OF FAITH** movement (WOF) isn't firmly grounded in God's Word, all kinds of heresies and errors arise among its preachers. No single error or group of errors are common to all; but together, they reflect a lack of biblical scholarship. In their book, *Defining Deception*,<sup>19</sup> Costi Hinn and Anthony Wood name the preachers and provide actual quotations from each, evidencing their falsehoods. Walter Martin does the same in his classic work, *The Kingdom of the Cults*.<sup>20</sup> We'll take a more general approach, and attempt to describe some things to beware. We presume deceit is involved. We're not judging motives; we're saying that when the truth of God is ignored, we can be deceived.

### ***Common Traits***

Simon the Magician in the Book of Acts provides us with a useful comparison. Magicians practice sleight of hand. They misdirect and draw the eye away from what they're actually doing. They engage the audience with banter, story-telling, and jokes to put them at ease and reduce their cynicism. They involve their audience, getting them to laugh in order to build trust. This magician is too nice, too funny, too eloquent, too attractive, or too inept, to be a threat. Lights, mirrors, flashy gimmicks and devices hold the audience's attention until the trick is over. Magicians mesmerize and deceive in order to win the adoration of their audience. ***Magicians entertain; preachers explain.***

Word of Faith preachers entertain their audiences to death. What does that entertainment look like in the church or through mass media? Remember, Satan imitates an angel of light (2Cor 11.14). Many of these things may be employed by sound biblical preachers, but taken to extremes by Word of Faith preachers – to lead us *away* from God's word.

1. Story-telling — It's usually about themselves or some funny incident, to illustrate their own truths, and not to illustrate the truth of God. This is to distract you from the errors they preach. This is just like... this reminds me of... and can't you identify with *that*? Don't you want *that*? Isn't that *desirable*... Eve? (Gen 3.6)
2. Making promises they can't keep — They distort what God promises, and then they blame it on your lack of faith when you don't get what you want (2Cor 6.16-7.1).
3. Strutting about the stage — They leave the pulpit and the bible behind to engage you and get you to *look at them* (Act 20.30). They lead a one-man parade on stage, as if inviting you to fall in line behind them, following the piper to your destruction.
4. Spring-boarding — They treat Scripture as a collection of isolated and independent statements, instead of a uniform and consistent body of truth. They draw more attention to what *they're* saying, than what *God's word* says (2Tim 4.2-3).

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<sup>19</sup> Costi Hinn and Anthony Wood, *Defining Deception: Freeing the Church from the Mystical-Miracle Movement*. (SCS Press, El Cajon CA, 2018), p. vii, note.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Bethany House, Grand Rapid MI, 1965, 2003), ed. Ravi Zacharias.

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5. Encouraging you to gratify your desires — The preacher promotes personal happiness through material or physical well-being, instead of calling you to submit to God, to be self-controlled, and to be content (Rom 13.14; Gal 5.23; Heb 13.5).
6. Putting on a show — When worship slips into entertainment, the congregation is no longer actively worshipping together. Believers become passive observers of worship. That's a sure sign that Christ has ceased to be the object of their faith and worship.
7. Hawking their wares — They promote their books and materials. They are introduced as a celebrity to make them the center of attention, and to make their materials more desirable. Their truths will allegedly cause you to prosper, instead of becoming better grounded in God's word and exercising biblical faith in Christ.
8. They claim to be a prophet and/or miracle-worker — They purport to have the power to see what can't be seen, know what can't be known, and do what can't be done by other believers (that's *Gnosticism*). They claim to be specially anointed by God, but it is only to draw followers after themselves (Act 20.30).

If we understand the purpose of healing as we find it used in the New Testament, we can see when it is being claimed for different purposes. That helps us see the error of it. It isn't an issue of whether it's real or not, but whether it fulfills God's purposes for it.

**THE PURPOSE OF MIRACULOUS HEALING.** The major defining characteristic of New Testament miracles was that they were used by God to authenticate the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For instance, Nicodemus acknowledged that the signs Jesus worked were from God (John 3:2); God validated Jesus through "signs and wonders and various miracles" (Heb 2:4); the Samaritan woman testified about Jesus' supernatural knowledge about her life (John 4:29); Philip performed exorcisms, healings, and other signs as he proclaimed the Messiah (Acts 8:6-8); the residents of Lydda and Sharon affirmed God's work in healing Aeneas (Acts 9:35); the disciples also practiced this (Matt 10:7-8; 9:35; Acts 8:13). True New Testament miracles always pointed to the person of Christ. Therefore, if the glory of God and the Good News of Christ aren't clarified or enhanced by a supposedly extraordinary act, it isn't a miracle of God.<sup>21</sup>

The traits listed above remind us that the gospel doesn't need to be packaged, or made attractive and entertaining to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness (Mat 5.6), those who long to be free (Luk 4.18). The gospel is inherently attractive to the elect.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (Joh 14:6) "All that the Father gives Me *will* come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." (Joh 6:37) "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (Joh 10.27)

We don't preach a gospel of health and wealth, but of grace and peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Act 20.24; Rom 10.15; Gal 1.6-7).

### **Some heresies taught by WOF preachers:**

**MYSTICAL SPEECH.** The "Word of Faith" belief system (WOF) tells people they can get healing, money, jobs, babies, and more, but ***they must speak these things into existence by faith***. This isn't describing "self-talk," or the power of positive thinking. These are *incantations*. "What I confess, I may possess." This changes biblical confession

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<sup>21</sup> Hinn, p. 10.



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from its focus on sin, faith, and right belief about Jesus Christ (Rom 10:9; 1John 1:9) to confession of a personal desire for temporal comforts — like healing and material prosperity. It tells us that God never planned for us to live in poverty, whether physical, mental, or spiritual. God will give you the ability to make your life a success. This teaching was a building block in the development of the **CHRISTIAN SCIENCE** cult.

**INSUFFICIENCY OF THE ATONEMENT.** Contrary to Hebrews 9:22, you may hear that Jesus' shed blood on the cross was insufficient for mankind's salvation, and that Jesus himself had to be born again. Jesus took upon himself Satan's nature through "spiritual death." It is claimed that Jesus was not the only begotten son of God until He was born again in hell and resurrected. This contradicts the clear teaching of John 3:16.

**"LITTLE GOD" THEOLOGY.** This heresy teaches people to exalt their view of themselves: *they too are a god*. "The believer is as much an incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth." Each person is "created on terms of equality with God, and can stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority ... God has made us as much like Himself as possible ... He made us the same class of being that He is Himself!" <sup>22</sup>

**A NINE-PERSON TRINITY.** You may hear an old *Gnostic* heresy that the Holy "Trinity" is comprised of *nine* distinct persons: God the Father is three persons, God the Son is three persons, and God the Holy Spirit is three persons.<sup>23</sup>

**KINOTIC THEOLOGY.** *Divided Natures in Christ.* To justify their teaching of modern miracles, you may hear it said that Jesus performed miracles, wonders, and signs, **as a man in right relationship to God** ... *not* as God. If He performed miracles because He was God, then they would be unattainable for us. Christ's nature was made the same as Man, they say, and thus *we* can be made like Him through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus "laid His divinity aside" to simply live as a man in right relationship to God. This denies the true deity of Christ and it rejects the hypostatic union declared in the Nicene Creed. <sup>24</sup> It is a poor attempt to explain Philippians 2:7, which describes Christ "emptying himself" of divine attributes. Wayne Grudem refutes this interpretation:

No recognized teacher in the first 1,800 years of church history ...thought that "emptied himself" in Philippians 2:7 meant the Son of God gave up some of his divine attributes ... The text does not say that Christ "emptied himself of some powers" ... The text *does* describe what Jesus did by "emptying": he did not do it by giving up any of his attributes, but rather by "taking the form of a servant," that is, by coming to live as a man. ... The context interprets the "emptying" as equivalent to "humbling himself." <sup>25</sup>

The theory is based on the **PANTHEISTIC** conception that God and man are not so absolutely different, and the one can be transformed into the other. Therefore, Jesus had no ability to heal the sick on his own. He couldn't cast out devils, and had no ability to raise the dead. After all, Jesus said in John 5:19, "the Son can do nothing of Himself." Thus, they claim, Jesus set aside His divinity. He put self-imposed restrictions on Himself *to show us that we could do it, too*. Jesus so emptied Himself that He was incapable of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 38-41.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-65

<sup>24</sup> See chapter 5, the Council of Ephesus in 449.

<sup>25</sup> S. M. Smith, "Kenosis, Kenotic Theology," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 600-602.

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doing what the Father required of Him without the Father's help. This is a different Jesus from the Jesus revealed in the Scripture and affirmed by historic Christian councils.

Between A.D. 350-450, at least three similar heretical positions arose. One was by **APOLLINARIS** who stressed the deity of Christ but discredited the bodily nature of Christ. The council of Constantinople quickly silenced this teaching. A second was that of **EUTYCHES** who taught a blending of Jesus' two natures into a mixture of the two. The doctrine of redemption was in danger, so an imperial council re-educated Eutyches. A third position was that of **ARIUS**, which is the one WOF embraces here.

**ARIANISM** asserted that Jesus had a human nature, but His deified nature was not wholly God. In one sense, Arius taught Jesus was a lesser being, a first created being; he was a half-god, and not entirely God. This teaching appealed to the **GNOSTICS** of the time. Today it appeals to **MORMONS** and **JEHOVAH WITNESSES**. That's because it rejects Christ's dual natures (God/ man) as well as Him being the only way, truth, and life. The question is whether Jesus is *homo-iousios* ("similar to God") or *homo-ousios* ("the same as God").

Arianism was condemned as heretical because it said Christ is less than fully God. It leaves the Christian faith with two gods; or else Jesus is neither god nor man. God the Father would remain unapproachable, and Jesus the Son could offer mankind no hope. The Bible doesn't teach that we are the same as Jesus. It doesn't teach that Jesus was born just like us. Each New Testament writer clearly described himself as a bond slave of the sinless Messiah Jesus.<sup>26</sup>

As you can see, *there's nothing new in any of this*. These are old heresies — like idolatry, Gnosticism, pantheism, Arianism, and monophysitism — differently expressed.

We'll finish with a movement that began in the late 1800s. Initially, it promoted what we consider an error (*Second Blessing Theology*). But it ended up embracing a reformed view of justification and sanctification. The theme of this course has been that orthodoxy (right doctrine) exposes both errors and heresies; and orthodoxy has been refined over time in response to heresies. Here, now, is an example of a movement which had been outside the bounds of historical orthodoxy, but chose to conform to it.

### **The Keswick Movement.**

What is "let-go-and-let-God" theology? It's called Keswick theology, and it's one of the most significant strands of **SECOND-BLESSING THEOLOGY**. It assumes that Christians experience two "blessings." The first is getting *saved*, and the second is getting *serious*. The change is dramatic: from a defeated life to a victorious life; from a lower life to a higher life; from a shallow life to a deeper life; from a fruitless life to a more abundant life; from being "carnal" to being "spiritual"; and from merely having Jesus as your Savior, to making Jesus your Master. People experience this second blessing through surrender and faith: "Let go and let God."

Keswick theology comes from the early Keswick movement. Keswick (pronounced KEH-zick) is a small town in the scenic Lake District of northwest England. Since 1875, it has

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-95.

## 7. Secularism Invades the Church

hosted a weeklong meeting in July for the Keswick Convention. The movement's first generation (about 1875-1920) epitomized what we still call "Keswick theology" today.

People who influenced Keswick theology include John Wesley, Charles Finney, and Hannah Whitall Smith. Significant proponents of Keswick theology include Evan H. Hopkins (Keswick's formative theologian), H. Moule (Keswick's scholar and best theologian), F. B. Meyer (Keswick's international ambassador), Andrew Murray (Keswick's foremost devotional author), J. Hudson Taylor and Amy Carmichael (Keswick's foremost missionaries), Frances Havergal (Keswick's hymnist), and W. H. Griffith Thomas, and Robert C. McQuilkin (leaders of the victorious life movement). People who were influenced by Keswick theology include leaders of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (A. B. Simpson), Moody Bible Institute (D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey), and Dallas Seminary (Lewis Chafer and Charles Ryrie).

**Reform:** Beginning in the 1920s, the Keswick Convention's view of sanctification began to shift from the view promoted by its early leaders. William Scroggie (1877–1958) led that transformation to a view of sanctification closer to the Reformed view. The official Keswick Convention that now hosts the annual Keswick conferences holds a Reformed view of sanctification and invites speakers who are confessionally reformed.

Keswick theology is pervasive because countless people have propagated it in so many ways, especially in sermons and devotional writings. It is appealing because Christians struggle with sin and want to be victorious in that struggle now. Keswick theology offers a quick fix, and its shortcut to instant victory appeals to genuine longings for holiness. Keswick theology, however, is not biblically sound. Here are just a few of the reasons why:

1. **Disjunction:** It creates two categories of Christians. This is the fundamental, linchpin issue.
2. **Perfectionism:** It portrays a shallow and incomplete view of sin in the Christian life.
3. **Quietism:** It tends to emphasize passivity, not activity.
4. **Pelagianism:** It tends to portray the Christian's free will as autonomously starting and stopping sanctification.
5. **Methodology:** It tends to use superficial formulas for instantaneous sanctification.
6. **Impossibility:** It tends to result in disillusionment and frustration for the "have-nots."
7. **Spin:** It tends to misinterpret personal experiences.

You can tell that Keswick theology has influenced people when you hear a Christian "testimony" like this: "I was saved when I was eight years old, and I surrendered to Christ when I was seventeen."

By "saved," they mean that Jesus became their Savior and that they became a Christian. By "surrendered," they mean that they gave full control of their lives to Jesus as their Master, yielded to do whatever He wanted them to do, and "dedicated" themselves through surrender and faith. That two-tiered view of the Christian life is *Let-Go-and-Let-God theology*.

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/why-let-go-and-let-god-bad-idea/>

## CONCLUSION

Every heresy we've explored, has attacked either the person or the work of Jesus Christ. That rule has held true for two thousand years. We've seen that really there are no "new" heresies — only old heresies dressed up to *appear* new. They all deny one or more of the following things about Jesus Christ:

They deny his godhood, they deny his manhood; they deny his virgin birth; they deny his miracles; they deny his bodily resurrection; they deny his bodily ascension; they deny his earthly authority; they deny his heavenly reign; they deny that Christ's perfect obedience is imputed to us; they deny that His sacrifice atoned for all our sins; they deny the necessity of his sacrifice; they deny the sufficiency of his sacrifice; they deny that he died only for the elect; they deny that he finally saved all those who belong to him; they deny that he alone can be, and is, Savior, Lord, Priest, King, and Mediator.

In short, they deny what the authoritative Word of God has clearly revealed about him. And in denying Jesus Christ, they reject the one and only means of eternal salvation.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."  
(Joh 14:6 <sup>NKJ</sup>)

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Act 4:12 <sup>NKJ</sup>)

Spurgeon is absolutely correct when he says, "I believe there are multitudes of men who cannot see these truths, or at least cannot see them in the way in which we put them, who nevertheless have received Christ as their Saviour." But that's because such persons are ELECT. Christian salvation is not the result of an intellectual exercise in which we come to the right conclusions about Jesus Christ and God's methodology. It is a sovereign act of grace bestowed on us by God, who has determined in his own will to save some, without regard to their merit, their innate capacity, or their profession of dogma. Election therefore graciously covers children who die in infancy, the mentally impaired, and those who never hear the true gospel. They were not chosen at their conversion, nor by their profession of faith (which would be the Arminian view). They were chosen by grace alone. Their profession was merely the instrument by which they accepted the gift which was prepared for them before time began, bestowed on them by the power of God's Spirit, and made effective for them by Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. Christ did not make us salvable. He fully and finally saved us on the cross. *That* is the gospel.

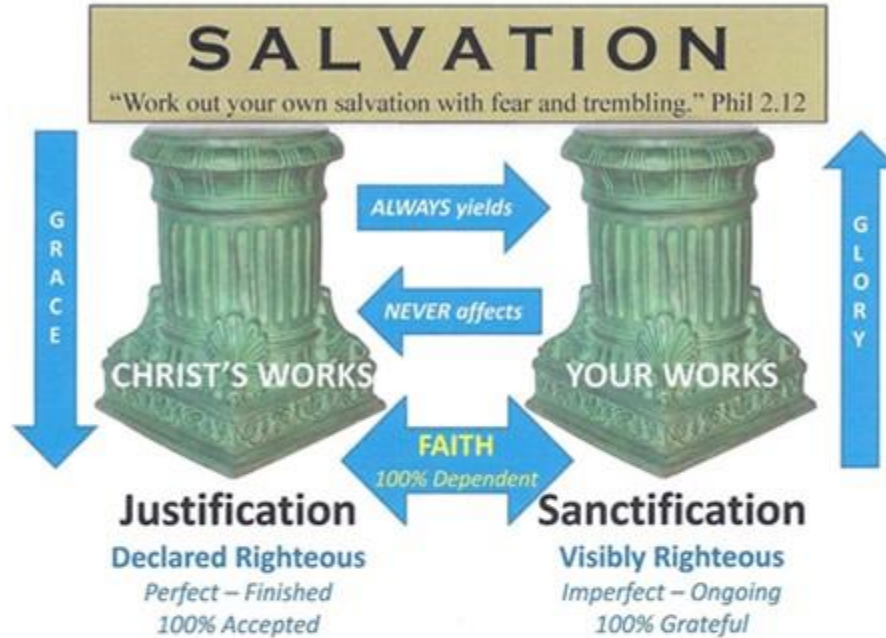
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## The Two Pillars of Salvation

**Justification** – love from God, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, by the HS

**Sanctification** – love to God, through obedience to the Word, by the HS



## The Law and the Gospel

