

Events:

Rise, Spread and Defense of Heretical Teaching

- Heretical teaching was in the church almost from the beginning. The writings of Paul, Peter and John mention them
 - False prophets (2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1; Revelation)
 - Wolves (Acts 20:29)
 - Deceivers (Romans 16:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; Titus 1:10; 2 John 1:7)
- The earliest heresies included the Judaizers and the Gnostics. The “Judaizers” (circumcision party) and the “Nicolaitans” are listed in the New Testament by name (Galatians 2, Titus 1 and Revelation 2).
- John’s gospel is aimed at both those who claimed that Christ was not Man and those who claimed that Christ was not God.
- Combating heretics during the first few centuries fell mostly to the local bishops – first using arguments through the use of the Word (polemics and apologetics), then using excommunication if necessary, and finally through church councils.
- Those bishops who were gifted in combating heresy and in maintaining the faith became our early church fathers.
- Heresies during the first 500 years centered around two key questions:
 - What is the nature of Jesus Christ?
 - What is the nature of the Trinity?
- Most of the later heresies can be derived from these early heresies – “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Heroes:

Justin Martyr

- Born around 100 in Flavia Neopolis (ancient Shechem). Died around 165.
- Not much is known about Justin’s life except through his own writings. What is known comes mostly from Rufinus, Irenaeus and Eusebius.
- He called himself a Samaritan, but his family may have been Greek or Roman.
- Justin was probably brought up as a pagan and later converted to Christianity.
- Justin studied philosophy while searching for God – the Stoics, Peripatetics, Pythagoreans and Plato – and in Plato “furnishing my mind with wings”.
- He devoted the rest of his life after conversion to teaching what he considered to be the real truth while still wearing his philosopher’s robe.
- Several of Justin’s books are known:
 - The “First Apology” addressed to the Roman Emperor and the Senate
 - The “Second Apology” addressed to the Roman Senate
 - The “Dialogue with Trypho” in which he discusses Old Testament prophecy with a Hebrew man named Trypho living in Corinth.
- Other writings are known – some lost including one entitled “Against Marcion”.

Heroes of the Christian Faith
Lesson 5 – 8/30/2009

- Some of the beliefs that Justin taught include:
 - An identity of the “logos” with Jesus Christ – but separate from and subordinate to the Father – “other, I mean, in number, not in will” (Dialogue 56)
 - He was firmly believed in prophecy and in Christ’s fulfillment of prophecy including virgin birth, born in Bethlehem and entering Jerusalem on a colt (First Apology 33, 34 and 35).
 - He identified Daniel 7 with Christ’s second coming (Dialogue 110) and believed that it would be soon after the appearance of the Antichrist (Dialogue 32)
- Justin was scourged and beheaded along with six companions for confessing their belief in Christ and by refusing to sacrifice to the gods sometime between 162 and 168 by the Roman prefect Rusticus.

Irenaeus of Lyons

- Born between 115 and 125 or between 130 and 142. Died around 202.
- Installed as the Bishop of Lugdunum (Gaul) in the Roman Empire in 177 or 178 after the martyrdom of Pothinus
- Born into a Greek Christian family and studied under Polycarp
- Fought actively against the Gnostic heresies of Marcion and Valentinus
- Wrote his five-volume book “On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis” (also known as “Against Heresies”) around 180 which depended on the scriptures including at least 21 of the 27 New Testament books. He also wrote several other minor works all attested by Eusebius as authentic.
- Some of his teachings include:
 - He is the first writer to assert the unity of the Old and New Testaments and the canonicity of all four gospels
 - He believed in the parallels between Adam and Christ as taught by Paul in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15
 - He asserted that “apostolic succession” is a chain-of-custody for orthodox belief and that there is no “secret knowledge” that the apostles would have failed to pass along to the subsequent bishops
 - He also believed in the literal interpretation of the “millennium” and an early form of “Mariology”
- Little is known about his death except that he was probably not martyred. He was buried in Lyons, France, but Huguenots destroyed the site in 1562.

Heresies:

Nicolaiism

- Arose in the 1st century.
- Mentioned by John in the letters to the seven churches
 - Revelation 2:6 – the church in Ephesus hated the Nicolaitans, whom Christ also hated

Heroes of the Christian Faith
Lesson 5 – 8/30/2009

- Revelation 2:15 – the church in Pergamum had Nicolaitan members and needed to repent
- Named for its supposed heretical founder named Nicolas (or Nikolaos) – some even suggest it the deacon Nicolaus mention in Acts 6:5
- Very little is known about their beliefs or doctrines
- Irenaeus wrote that “they lead lives of unrestrained indulgence”
- Clement of Alexandria exonerated Nicolas as the source of the sect’s promiscuity
- Eusebius claims that the sect was very short lived

Ebionism

- Arose in the 1st century from the area near and around Jewish Antioch (Syria).
- Often identified with the “Judaizers” or the “sect of the circumcision” spoken against by Paul
- At its root, Ebionism denies the divinity of Christ. He is not the “Son of God”.
- The origin is unknown. “Ebion” means “poor” and may have several sources:
 - A real person named “Ebion”
 - A sect of the Jewish Christian community called the “Ebionites”
 - The Lord’s blessing on the “poor” in His Sermon on the Mount
 - Jibes from its opponents calling it a “poor” belief
- Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph (although some followers do acknowledge the virgin birth). He was not pre-existent.
- He was “adopted” by God the Father at the time of His baptism when the Spirit descended like a dove and the Father said, “This is my son, in whom I am well pleased.”
- Jesus lived a pure and sinless life through his own effort by keeping the Law perfectly
- Jesus was a great prophet and teacher – and our supreme example to follow.
- His death did not accomplish salvation, but He was a stoic example of how we should face death ourselves
- “Roger Bannister Theology” – once Bannister broke the four minute mile, others could also do it – once Jesus lived a perfect life, others *can* also do it
- This is purely (though not simply) a works salvation – “Just try harder.”
- Irenaeus and Hippolytus refuted Ebionism in the 2nd century. Also, Origen and Eusebius refuted it in the 3rd and 4th centuries.
- It leaves its followers spiritually dead in their own sins, it leads to spiritual pride in their own (and others) minds. It leads to being self-centered and “puffed up”.