

Sunday, May 27, 2012—Great Lakes Grace Bible Conference—The Anatomy of Heresy

Introduction

- Have you ever believed or taught something that was false? We all have, none of us is infallible.
- Does simply believing something that is wrong make someone a heretic? What is the Bible's definition of heresy?
- This morning we want to consider the following aspects of what I am going to call The Anatomy of Heresy.
 - Biblical definition of heresy
 - Heresy as a work of the flesh
 - Why must there be heresy among us?

Biblical Definition of Heresy

- Titus 3:10—according to *Strong's Concordance*, a heretick is defined as one who is schismatic, factious, or a follower of a false doctrine.
- *Websters's 1828 Dictionary* defines someone who is factious as being:
 - Given to faction; addicted to form parties and raise dissensions, in opposition to government; turbulent; prone to clamor against public measures of men. No state is free from factious citizens.
 - Pertaining to faction; proceeding from faction; as factious tumults; factious quarrels.
- There are fundamentally two issues here the warrant further investigation: 1) heretics follow and believe false doctrines, 2) they seek to create factions around these false beliefs.
- Galatians 5:19-21—the scary reality regarding heresy is that all heresies stem from the work of the flesh.
- *Strong's Concordance* offers the following definition of the Greek word translated heresies in Galatians 5:20: “a body of men following their own tenets, or dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims.”
- The Greek word “*hairesis*” is found nine times in nine verses in the King James Bible, of which five times it is rendered “sect” in English:
 - Acts 5:17—“sect of the Sadducees”
 - Acts 15:5—“sect of the Pharisees”

- Acts 24:5—“sect of the Nazarenes”
 - Acts 26:5—“sect of our religion”
 - Acts 28:22—“concerning this sect”
- The word “sect,” according to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*, carries the following meaning:
 - A body or number of persons united in tenets, chiefly in philosophy or religion, but constituting a distinct party by holding sentiments different from those of other men. Most *sects* have originated in a particular purloin, who taught and propagated some peculiar notions in philosophy or religion, and who is considered to have been its founder. Among the Jews, the principal *sects* were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. In Greece were the Cynic *sect*, founded by Antisthenes; and the Academic *sect*, by Plato. The Academic *sect* gave birth to the Peripatetic, and a Cynic to the Stoic.
 - In addition, to its usage in Galatians 5:21, the remaining three occurrences of the Greek word “*haireisis*” are translated as heresies or heresy by the King James translators:
 - Acts 24:14—“heresy”
 - I Corinthians 11:19—“heresies”
 - II Peter 2:1—“heresies”
 - Heresy, according to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*, is “a fundamental error in religion, or an error of opinion respecting some fundamental doctrine of religion.”
 - Consequently, according to the Bible, fundamental errors in religious thought or belief (heresies) lead to the establishment of sects which are characterized by shared tenants of false doctrine. As a result, it seems to follow that heresies are the intellectual foundation for sects.
 - The sect of the Sadducees identified in Acts 5:17 stands out as a clear Biblical example of the connection between heresies and sects. It has often been said that the Sadducees were “sad you see” because they denied the resurrection of the dead.
 - Luke 20:27
 - The heretical beliefs of the Sadducees centered on their denial of resurrection. This constitutes their fundamental error in religious belief and doctrine. Unfortunately, this error was widespread as there was an entire faction or sect within Israel’s leadership that held this heretical view.

Heresy As A Work of the Flesh

- Galatians 5:20—since all heresies are the work of the flesh according to Paul, it is imperative to realize that pride or the possibility of self advancement motivates those who hold spurious doctrines to promote their views in an attempt to draw away disciples unto themselves, thereby

forming sects.

- Acts 20:28-30—this pattern mirrors Paul’s warning to the Ephesian elders.
 - Verse 29—Paul warns of outsiders seeking to enter into their midst with the objective of sowing discord and confusion amongst the brethren, i.e., the Judaizers.
 - Verse 30—he warns about men from within their own assembly that would arise speaking untruth in an attempt to create their own personal following.
- Galatians 4:17—it seems that the fleshly desire to disciples is one of the main motivators for those who would teach heresy.
- So what makes someone a heretic?
 - First, they hold some doctrinal belief or position that is contrary to the clear teachings of God’s Word rightly divided.
 - Second, they actively promote their false beliefs with the goal of establishing followers.

Why Must There Be Heresies Among Us?

- Having its root in our natural flesh programming, heresy has the potential to be just as common as hatred, strife, wrath, or envy in the believer’s life. Consequently, heresy is not something that we should not view as a rarity. In contrast, we should acknowledge heresy as an ever present threat to any community of believers.
- I Corinthians 11:19—not only does Paul speak to the common frequency of heresies within their assembly, he also teaches that their very presence would be an opportunity for the Corinthians to see who was approved and who was not. We learn two things from this verse.
 - First, heresy, as a work of the flesh, would be both common and necessary.
 - Second, the reason heresies are necessary is because without them it is difficult for believers to know who is approved and who is not.
- Moreover, it is interesting to connect the word “approved” in I Corinthians 11:19 with the word “approved” in II Timothy 2:15. This connection between heresy and who the approved of God are must not be overlooked.
- By comparing I Corinthians 11:19 with II Timothy 2:15, a third conclusion about the anatomy of heresy emerges.
 - The approved of God are those who rightly divide the Word of truth and are thereby able

to answer the heretical teaching. Therefore, heresy in Paul's view is any doctrine that is contrary to the Word rightly divided.

- II Timothy 2:16-18—contains all the components of heresy we have been discussing:
 - Verse 16—Timothy is given the same instructions that the Ephesians elders were in Acts 20, namely, not to listen to those speaking profane, vain, or perverse things.
 - Verse 17--Paul identifies Hymenaeus and Philetus as the source of these profane and vain babblings and compares the effect of their teaching to that of a canker, i.e., a virulent, corroding ulcer; or anything that corrodes, corrupts or destroys.
 - Verse 18—these men were teaching that “the resurrection is past already.” Herein we see the first component of heresy according to our working definition, the false belief that the resurrection had already occurred. Furthermore, it is clear that these men fulfill the second part of our definition by seeking to draw away disciples after themselves. This is obvious because they publicly promoted their error to the extent that they overthrew the faith of some.
- How does one combat destructive doctrinal errors of this nature? The answer is clear, by rightly dividing the Word of truth. Who rightly divides the Word of truth? Approved workmen who need not to be ashamed. Why must there be heresies according to I Corinthians 11:19? So that “they who are approved might be made manifest”. Once again, Paul's definition of heresy is any doctrine that subverts the Word of God rightly divided.

Concluding Thoughts

- Heresy is not something that was determined by church councils or the Roman Catholic Inquisition. We need to remember that Paul wrote his epistles and identified heretics in the middle of the 1st century, over one hundred years before the organized church identified any of the traditional heresies associated with the Christian faith. Therefore, we should not allow church tradition to form our definition of heresy.
- II Timothy 2:25-26—teaches that we should try to instruct heretics in the spirit of meekness so that they might recover themselves out of the snare of the devil and acknowledge the truth
- Titus 3:10—informs us that heretics are not to be tolerated indefinitely.
- Titus 3:11—the English word “subverted” means overthrown; overturned; entirely destroyed, according to *Webster's 1828 Dictionary*. Heretics are sinning and condemning themselves or opposing themselves according to II Timothy 2:25