Tenets of the Faith

Week 1

IB What is *heresy?* (K 10 mins)

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First know that *A person does not call a line crooked unless he/she has some idea of a straight line.*

1. What is it? (definition; summary of the doctrine)

* What is Doctrine?

Christianity is a religion founded on a message of good news rooted in the significance of the life of Jesus Christ. In Scripture, then, **doctrine refers to the entire body of essential theological truths that define and describe that message** ... The message includes historical facts, such as those regarding the events of the life of Jesus Christ ... But it is deeper than biographical facts alone... Doctrine is **scriptural teaching** on theological truths.[[1]](#endnote-1)

* What is Truth?

When he was on trial for his life Jesus spoke some words which give an answer to this question. He said in John 18:37, *For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.* THE TRUTH! There is truth—truth that comes from outside the world and gives meaning to the world. The world doesn't make this truth. It doesn't shape or change this truth. It is THE TRUTH, not a truth for me and a different truth for you. But THE TRUTH for all of us. Unchanging, absolute. If you choose to ignore it, as Pilate did when he asked, *What is truth?,* (John 18.38)it doesn’t change the truth.

Beliefs do not constitute truths. Many beliefs do not mean many truths. Feelings to not determine truth. Absolute truth does not change based on preference or voting. Without God sending Jesus to *bear witness* to the truth: as Truth Himself, anything and everything is acceptable, heresy would not exist, and truth wouldn’t matter. But in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God (John 1.1). Jesus is God’s Word, *the Way the Truth and the Light* (John 14.6). God’s Word *became flesh and dwelt among us ,...full of grace and truth* (John 1.14). I can really get excited about this but there are additional scriptures below to show Jesus, the Word, and God’s ABSOLUTE unchanging truth are ONE, and it is the Word that sets us free.[[2]](#endnote-2)

* What is Heresy?

Definition of Heresy[[3]](#endnote-3)

* Heresy is the choice to abandon the widely accepted teaching on an essential doctrine and embrace one’s own view.
* Heresy is to preach another gospel, as Paul stated in Galatians 1:9: *As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed*.

*Heresy* is doctrine at variance with accepted doctrine, or any belief or practice that explicitly undermines the truth (the Word of God). Heresy is strongly at variance with established beliefs. A *heretic* is *someone who has compromised an essential doctrine and lost sight of who God really is…* *Heresy* means *choice*—a heretic is choosing *to deviate from the traditional teaching in favor of one’s own insight.* Heresy comes against Doctrine, *what Scripture teaches on theological truths.*

According to Easton's Bible Dictionary, the word *heresy* comes from a Greek word, meaning a self-chosen opinion or the sect holding that opinion. Heresies came to be understood as self-chosen doctrines that do not originate from God.

What Heresy is **Not**

Unlike popular depictions, a heretic is not a rebel, someone who stands up to the institutional church. Neither are people heretics because they asked questions or struggled with their faith. The problem was their answers created chaos and confusion among ordinary believers.

Not every disagreement in the church is heresy. Having a different opinion is not wrong, but when the opinion is divisive or maintained in defiance of clear biblical teaching, it becomes heretical. The apostles themselves disagreed at times (see Acts 15:36-41), and Peter once had to be rebuked for divisive and legalistic behavior (Galatians 2:11-14). But, praise the Lord, through an attitude of humility and submission to the God of truth, the apostles worked through their disagreements and set an example for us.

C.S. Lewis warned the contemporary church about *chronological snobbery,* the *arrogant assumption that the values and beliefs of our own time have surpassed all that came before*. We also risk believing we are immune from *heresies* of the past because of our supposed evolved, highly tuned set of beliefs.

Upsides of Heresies

Yet while heretics created confusion and chaos, there was an upside: *the church was forced to study Scripture, wrestle with intellectual problems, and articulate more clearly the ‘faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*’ (see Jude 3). [[4]](#endnote-4)

1 Corinthians 11.19, shows how heresies, like the tares growing with the wheat, can separate and manifest the Truth more clearly: *For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you*.

2. Taught in the Old Testament

Not going to get into the teachings of the Old Testament on heresies, but a cursory overview of the way God saw deviation from the patterns He established is clear. A few of the many examples:

* God came against mixture with Phinehas thrusting people through with a dart when they mixed up their beliefs,
* How Moses addressed the golden calf,
* How Gideon was made mighty and called by God, but was tripped up by collecting gold and making an ephod that caused the Israelites to prostitute themselves instead of being faithful to the One True God,
* How Balaam, who, in his desire to acquire wealth and status in the eyes of King Balak, became a stumbling block of the entire nation of Israel...
* How Achan disobeyed by taking the spoils of a city and hiding them, and God responded by an earthquake swallowing his entire family before the Israelites could be victorious again.

Don’t miss out studying the Old Testament because it gives a clear picture of how God sets the *straight line* and how He deals with departure from the *Doctrine/Truth/teaching* He sets forth.

3. Taught in the New Testament

*Hairesis* (heresy) often meant different factions (see Acts 15.5, 26.5, 5.17) or sects – even the chiefs of the Jews in Rome using it to say the ideas Paul was following in following Christ (Acts 24.5, 24.14, 28.22, 28.22), but over time it came to mean *deviating from established doctrine in major areas like the Trinity, Christology, and soteriology*. Romans 1.18-26 explains it this way:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections:...

Those who deviated from established doctrine, adding and taking away from the Word and Truth of God’s Word, became known as heretics, people whose teachings *the Church at large considers erroneous and even dangerous to the faith.[[5]](#endnote-5)*

When Paul later uses *hairesis* in his letters he even places *hairesis* on a vice list. *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions,****divisions****(hairesis), envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.* (Gal 5:19–20)

Clearly by the time of 2 Peter, *hairesis* had come to mean something more like our heresies. The context could still support the translation “factions,” but Peter’s focus is on teaching, on doctrine—and he names one central and essential doctrine that is a *hairesis* to deny.

2 Peter 2.1 - *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable* ***heresies****, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*

4. Historical Progression

The Inquisition of the Catholic Church Against Heresy

Heresy has existed in every age, but during the 12th century, the Catholic Church took unprecedented action against it. As the power of the Catholic Church increased in Europe, dissenting voices of other Christian groups became more troublesome. Pope Alexander III (1162–63) encouraged informers, so the church could discover evidence of heresy. In 1184 Pope Lucius III issued a decree that a convicted heretic was to be handed over to secular authorities for punishment. Over the next several decades, the church increased the severity of punishment for heresy, ultimately making it a capital offense under Pope Gregory IX. During this time, the Dominicans became the principal agents of the Inquisition, a special court given authority to judge intentions as well as actions. When heresy was suspected in a village, an inquisitor was sent to preach a sermon calling for the villagers to come forward with reports of heresy. This was a *general inquisition* that included a period of grace for anyone who would confess. This was followed by a *special inquisition* that might include coercion, false witnesses, and torture to obtain a “confession.” Those identified as heretics were then ordered to do penance, which might consist of mandatory church attendance, pilgrimage to a shrine, loss of property, or imprisonment. Heretics who refused to repent were sentenced to death. The Inquisition continued in most areas of Europe until the 15th century.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Obviously, the gauge for *heretical* teaching varies according to the established orthodoxy of the day. Any group or individual who differs from another group can technically be called heretical. Christians are called heretics by the Jews. In Acts 24:14, Paul said *But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:...*) The “heretics” of the Middle Ages were only heretical in that they disagreed with the Catholic Church, not because they held unbiblical doctrines. The Spanish Inquisition executed over 14,000 people, many of them for simply possessing a Bible. Thus, biblically speaking, it was the established church itself that was heretical during the Middle Ages.[[7]](#endnote-7)

*It’s about discernment. And what the early church did was to say that we are under obligation to give the best account of what we find in Scripture. It’s very important to do this properly*.[[8]](#endnote-8)

The term *heresy* came to designate divisions, schisms, and factions which held divergent opinions within the early church. As Christianity grew and developed, the church established the basic teachings of the faith. Those basics can be found in the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed. Over the centuries, however, theologians and religious figures have proposed doctrines that contradict established Christian beliefs. To keep those beliefs pure, the church singled out people who taught or believed ideas considered a threat to Christianity.

5. Heretical Counterfeits (impact of false doctrine, what truths it changes; how it affects

the Gospel, sources of the counterfeits)

For a study of many of the heresies against Christianity see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_heresies>.

Ideas from men seeking power and continue to bombard the Church and the Gospel and cut

away at the vicarious atonement of Christ, His Diety, and the role of His people. It imperative that we heed the example of the Bereans in Acts 17.11 as *they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

Men continue to follow Satan who said in his heart *I will ascent to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God... I will make myself like the Most High.* (Isaiah 14.13-14)

6. Application Today (why it matters so much where it puts Jesus, the body of believers, Israel,

truth, etc.)

* Heresy cannot stand with truth

The truth of Christ will unify believers (John 17:22-23), but heresy, by its very nature, cannot peacefully co-exist with the truth. We are continually warned to not *stray* from the Truth (JESUS and His WORD are TRUTH!)[[9]](#endnote-9)

How do we guard against heresy? As we submit ourselves to the authority of God’s Word and deal with one another in love and respect, divisions and heresies will be diminished. Philippians 2:2-3 is a good starting point: *Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves*.

* Heresy is dangerous and can change your relationship to God

*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction*. 2 Pet. 2.1

* We have been warned over and over in Scripture to test teachings/spirits/prophecies

*Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.* 2 Tim 1:13

*As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine,...* 1 Timothy 1:3-6

*Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.* 2 Timothy 1:13-14

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.* 1 John 4.1

*Do not spurn the gifts and utterances of the prophets [do not depreciate prophetic revelations nor despise inspired instruction or exhortation or warning]. But test and prove all things [until you can recognize] what is good; [to that] hold fast.* 1 Thess 5.20-21

* Separate from those who bring you away from the Truth of the Word of God.

A "heretical person" is one who follows his own self-willed "questions," and who is to be avoided. *As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him.* (Titus 3.10) Heresies signify self-chosen doctrines not emanating from God and should be guarded against.

*I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.* *But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.* 1 Cor 5.9-13

*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?* Amos 3.3

*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.* Eph 5.11

*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*. 2 Cor 6.14-17

*Do not be so deceived and misled! Evil companionships (communion, associations) corrupt and deprave good manners and morals and character.* 1 Corinthians 15.33 AMP

7. Supporting Scripture and references

https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-does-heresy-mean.html

<https://www.gotquestions.org/heresy-definition.html>

<https://www.learnreligions.com/what-is-heresy-700684>

1. *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. John 14.6, John 1.14, John 8.32, John 17.17, 2 Timothy 2.15, John 4.24, John 1.1, John 1.17, Revelation 19.11, 2 Timothy 4.2-4 (turning *away* from truth unto fables; not enduring *sound doctrine*), 2 Timothy 3.16-17, Romans 1.18, John 18.37, John 8.31-32, Psalm 119.160, Psalm 119.142, James 1.18 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Dictionary.com defines *heresy* as:

   opinion or doctrine at variance with the orthodox or accepted doctrine, especially of a church or religious system.

   the maintaining of such an opinion or doctrine.

   the willful and persistent rejection of any article of faith by a baptized member of the church.

   any belief or theory that is strongly at variance with established beliefs, customs, etc. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Know the Heretics, Justin Holcomb [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Michael Bird [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inquisition> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. https://www.gotquestions.org/inquisitions.html [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Alister McGrath [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Romans 1.18-25; John 14.6; John 16.13; John 8.31-32; 1 John 1.8; 2 Tim 4.4; 2 Peter 2.2; 2 Tim 2.15; 1 John 2.4; 2 Tim 3.14-17; 1 Tim 6.3; 1 Tim 3.14-15; 1 Peter 1.22-23 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)