

# Heroes of Faith – The Church Age

## *Faith Marked By Persecution Part II*

### *Internal Persecution*

#### Introduction:

1. This period of time (300-1500's or 4<sup>th</sup> century through the 16<sup>th</sup> century) as it relates to "Church History" is filled with even more error, heresy, corruption, and compromise; and seems to be a continued fulfillment of what the apostles described would happen:
  - "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth" (I Tim. 4:1-3)
  - "For a time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (II Timothy 4:3-4)
  - "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also." (I John 2:22-23)
2. As we explore various "Heroes of Faith" during this period referred to by some as the "Christian Middle Age" and by others as "The Dark Age" it won't be without some basic controversy as to whether they were hero or heretic. I'll do my best to present a fair and balanced approach on those people that we will examine and attempt to be sensitive to the varying denominational influences that you might have.

3. The introduction of corruption, compromise, heresy and error into the Church causes two significant things to happen:
- Some Christians will leave the cities where the Church existed and isolate themselves in “**cloistered**” groups later called \_\_\_\_\_ where they will devote themselves to the study of God’s Word. We have these “monastic communities” to thank for much of the protection and translation of the Scriptures that we have today. Without these walled communities (separated from worldly influence) the Scriptures may have been lost to us!
  - Others will remain within the ranks of the Church (bishops, priests, theologians, etc.) and speak against these heretical persuasions. These “**Champions of Truth**” will be our primary focus for this portion of our study.
4. The one thing that becomes blatantly obvious in this part of our study is that truth makes no allowance for error - Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father:
- “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6)
  - “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12)
  - “For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”. (Philippians 2:9-11)
  - “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example of those who would believe in Him for eternal life” (I Timothy 1:15-16)
  - This is the Truth that we stand upon and on this foundation we can easily determine the difference between It (Truth) and error. Let’s look at some of the error and heresy that continually challenged the doctrines of the Church.

## **Identifying Error/Heresy facing the Early Church:**

### **1. Gnosticism:**

- It comes from the Greek word “*gnosis*” and means *knowledge* and in many circles of “Orthodoxy” it has evolved into a sort of “secret knowledge” as if the followers of this teaching in some way had the ability to understand the “mysteries” of life through the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom and philosophy.
- There basic belief and teachings were:
  - 1) The material world is evil and therefore all things material (this includes the flesh – our own physical bodies), have no intrinsic goodness about them.
  - 2) *The “spirit world” where much of the mystical expressions and pursuits of the Gnostic is where all goodness rests.*
  - 3) To find true peace one must “experience” a separation from all that is bad (the physical realm – the body) and in “spirit” discover that inner pursuit that leads to all that is good. Much of this teaching is found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and others Eastern religions.

### **2. Stoicism:**

- Its basic tenet is that self-control, fortitude and detachment from distracting emotions, will allow a person to become more of a clear thinker, level headed and unbiased.
- In perfecting the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (accomplished through the pursuit of philosophy) it allows the person to become tolerant or indifferent to pain and pleasure.
- This system of belief is driven by virtue, reason and natural law but the peace that it pursues is peace with oneself and not necessarily peace with God.
- It is foundational to many of the humanistic pursuits of the later centuries

### 3. Asceticism:

- *It is the active pursuit of virtue with the intending purpose of achieving greater spirituality. This is accomplished through denying the flesh all worldly pleasures.*
- Where asceticism usually erred is when it was taken to its extreme. Somehow the denial of worldly pleasures was interpreted to mean that we should beat our bodies into submission by torture, mutilation, or abstaining from sex, eating, or sleep. These extreme virtues were considered a necessity to achieve human enlightenment and not necessarily to draw close to God.
- When we seek to achieve “**enlightenment**” at the human level (in this case through the denial of the flesh) it falls short because were not intended to separate what God has put together (mind, body and soul).
- To deny the flesh to obtain a sort of oneness with God “misses the mark” because we cannot in and of ourselves atone for the error (sin) that exists within our entire being - only Jesus can!

### 4. Dualism:

- Is a teaching (primarily from \_\_\_\_\_ philosophy) in which mind and matter are two separate and distinct entities.
- This Gnostic heresy seeks to promote a two god system and in some cases (depending on the religion) a multi, plural, or poly god system of belief.
  - 1) One god created what is \_\_\_\_\_ (the mind)
  - 2) One god created what is \_\_\_\_\_ (matter – the body)
- This belief system has its roots in **Zoroastrianism** which can be traced back to the times surrounding the Tower of Babel.
- This teaching (Dualism) is at the core of some of our modern day transcendental mystical religions of Hinduism, Mormonism, Kabbalahism, Scientology, and some of the extreme Shiite forms of Islam.

## 5. Docetism:

- A belief that Jesus' physical body was an \_\_\_\_\_ and so was His crucifixion. As such, Jesus only “**seemed**” to have a physical body and only **seemed** to have died.
- This is a “Gnostic” belief that permeated the first century and was considered heretical by the Church but it began a process where some (within the church) began to question the validity of Christ's Deity and or His humanity.
- Some state that this heresy died out in the first millennium but not before it did a great deal of damage and led to the most extreme heresy facing the early church which was Arianism.

## 6. Arianism:

- This is a view held by followers of Arius which began in the 4<sup>th</sup> century
- The basic teaching was that; God the Father and God the Son were not co-eternal. **They believed and taught that Jesus (even in His pre-incarnate status) was divine but none the less a created being.** In other words at some point in time Jesus did not exist and therefore would have been inferior to the Father.
- This position (Arianism) was disputed and deemed \_\_\_\_\_ by the early Church but this is where much of the erosion of “Orthodoxy” (the adherence to traditional and established beliefs) began.
- The large percentage of early “church leaders” continued to support “Trinitarian” doctrine and only a handful of “rogue priests” attempted to challenge this belief by supporting Arianism. In the end the early push towards Arianism failed and Trinitarianism prevailed but not without some significant schisms that would follow the **Council of Nicea**.
- At the **Council of Nicea** several things were decided and one of them was the declaration that Arianism was heresy and therefore it was condemned. **Thus the doctrine of the Trinity prevailed** and has been an uncontested doctrine in all major branches of the Eastern Orthodox, the Western Church, and Protestantism.

## **Historical Events that Affected the Church (A.D. 300-600)**

1. The **Emperor Constantine** professes to be a Christian (although disputed by some) and made this claim; “I have experienced this in others and in myself, for I walked not in the ways of righteousness.....But the Almighty God who sits in the court of heaven granted me what I did not deserve”
2. The “**Edict of Milan**” was issued as a joint declaration by Constantine I (ruler of the Western Roman Empire) and Licinius (Roman Ruler of the Eastern Empire) in 313 AD which stopped the persecution of Christians and in effect **made Christianity legal within the Roman Empire.**
3. The **1<sup>st</sup> Council of Nicea** was convened by Emperor Constantine in A.D. 325 and the meeting consisted of a large group of Christian bishops (approx. 300) who gathered to establish solidarity in the Trinitarian position and declare Arianism to be heretical. There were a number of significant accomplishments and this meeting was the first of many councils that met to formulate various creeds (i.e. the Nicene Creed) and doctrinal positions that helped to battle the continued onslaught of heresy.
4. Later the **Emperor Theodosius I**; (The Roman Emperor from about 379 until 395 and responsible for once again uniting the Roman Empire as one..... and further the last Emperor of a united Roman Empire); also claimed to be a Christian and is **responsible for making Christianity the “official” Roman religion.**
5. This combination of “religion” and “government” paved the way for what eventually leads to compromise and corruption within the organized “Church” specifically the Roman Church.
6. The natural progression of the Church merging with Government led to the authority (religiously, politically, and socially) within the Roman Empire being heavily wielded by the **Supreme Pontiff** called the **Pope**.
7. The negative result of all of this compromise between religion and government allowed for certain “religious leaders” to be selfishly motivated and at times were improperly influenced by unbelievers which allowed for corruption to rule the day.
8. **This corruption led to “The Church” now persecuting Christians....**

## Champions of Truth (A.D. 300-600)

### 1. Athanasius of Alexandria (298-373 AD)

- Background Information

- 1) He was born in Alexandria, Egypt
- 2) His parents were quite wealthy, they were Christians and influential in Athanasius coming to faith in Christ
- 3) He became a Christian \_\_\_\_\_ in the 4<sup>th</sup> century in Alexandria, Egypt
- 4) The Catholic Church acknowledges him as a \_\_\_\_\_ and those within the Protestant community regard him as a great \_\_\_\_\_ of the Church.

- His contributions to the advancement of Christianity

- 1) He was the chief opponent to **Arianism** and his writings reflect that it was \_\_\_\_\_ and dangerous to Christianity. He opposed Arianism his entire life!
- 2) His writings \_\_\_\_\_ the doctrines held and taught by the Apostles. In many ways his writings laid the foundation for many of the “orthodox” doctrines held by the early church and still remain to this day.
- 3) It was Athanasius, in his Easter letter written in A.D. 367, who was the first person to acknowledge and identify the same \_\_\_\_\_ books of the New Testament that are contained in our Bibles today.
- 4) Because of his listing these 27 books as authoritative it will lead to them being \_\_\_\_\_ at a later council/synod in Carthage in \_\_\_\_\_ AD.
- 5) According to Norman Geisler (a modern day Apologist and Theologian); there has been no significant challenge to this list since they were accepted.

- There were those who were **critical** of Athanasius and opposed his views, but much of that criticism comes from the supporters of Arius.
  - 1) Those who opposed him claim that he was so passionate in his objections to Arianism and his unwillingness to compromise in his Theological beliefs; that he would resort to intimidation, beatings, excommunication, and even imprisonment to those who opposed him.
  - 2) Some claim that it was he who was responsible for the theological concepts such as “just wars” (Crusades) and inquisitions.
  - 3) As a side note; most modern day historians do not support these claims that he was a promoter of the Crusades and inquisitions but I said I would be fair!
  - 4) In my opinion Athanasius was more of a **victim** of intimidation and abuse than the one who was forcing his views on others.
- In the end although Emperor Constantine will originally side with Athanasius against Arius, he will eventually succumb to the call to compromise and find himself **banishing** Athanasius for his continued strong stand against heresy.
  - 1) Because of his strong stand against heresy, Athanasius will be exiled (some 5-7 times) by Emperor Constantine and other Emperors who follow.
  - 2) During this time Athanasius will spend time with fellow believers who are often called (Desert Fathers). These were monks and hermits that live in various remote areas of Egypt.
  - 3) It will be during these periods of exile where Athanasius will continue to impact others with a “**right teaching**” and thus will continue to \_\_\_\_\_ those (common ones) who will stand against compromise and corruption of the Church in the years called the Middle Ages or \_\_\_\_\_.
- We should be eternally grateful for a “Hero” such as Athanasius who chose to remain faithful in securing, protecting, and promoting the Truth claims of the Gospel as they were intended!



## 2. Jerome (347-420 AD)

- Background Information
  - 1) Jerome was born to Christian parents (in the region known as Dalmatia – later called Yugoslavia and now Bosnia and Herzegovina).
  - 2) Later (as a young lad) traveled to Rome to pursue rhetoric and philosophy
  - 3) He became interested in “language techniques”, later referred to as grammar. He eventually took an interest in Koine (common) Greek and although at first his interest was in philosophy, his travels took him to Gaul where he made many Christian friends.
  - 4) On several occasions he became seriously ill and one specific instance he reports of seeing a vision that encouraged him to lay aside his secular studies and pursue the things of God.
  - 5) Subsequent to this he spent some time in the desert (probably in a monastic community) where he pursued an “ascetic” lifestyle and devoted himself to the study of the Scriptures.
- His most significant contribution was the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament into \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 1) He chose the Hebrew Old Testament over the Septuagint (Greek Translation) due to the translation errors many claimed existed in the Septuagint.
  - 2) This Latin version of the Bible is called “The \_\_\_\_\_” which was intended for the common person to read and understand.
  - 3) This would become the standard Bible for a millennium.
  - 4) “Ironically Jerome’s Bible added impetus to the use of Latin as the Western Church’s language, resulting centuries later in a liturgy and a Bible that **lay people could not understand** – precisely the opposite of Jerome’s original intention.” (131 Christians Everyone should Know)

## **Historical Events that Affected the Church (590's through early 1500's)**

1. During this period the Church witnessed the rise of **Papal authority** in which the Pope (sometimes just a religious leader but often a combined religious and political leader) often directed the affairs of the entire empire.
2. **622 AD:** Official birth of Islam
3. **787 AD:** The Second Council of Nicea (the seventh official ecumenical council) in which the restoration of “icons” or holy images was considered permissible.
4. **800 AD:** Charlemagne is crowned as Holy Roman Emperor and attempts to reunite the Roman Empire and desires to be its supreme ruler but isn't successful.
5. **1054 AD: The Great Schism** in which the Western Church (headquartered in Rome- aka ***Western Catholicism***) and the Eastern Church headquartered in Constantinople- aka ***Eastern Orthodox***).
6. **1095 AD:** The first of several Crusades are launched in an attempt to recapture the Holy Land from the Muslims.
7. **1173 AD:** The **Waldensian movement** begins which was considered a schismatic (divisive) group by the Catholic Church and labeled as heretical. There were many issues (primarily doctrinal) that caused this group to adopt a more **separatist** view. They **did not support** “Baptismal regeneration” (salvation by the act of baptism), infant baptism, or any other means of salvation by external means. *They also did not embrace the ultimate authority of the Pope* and considered Jesus Christ as the head of the Church. They were sort of a precursor to the Reformation but they would not consider themselves “reformers” but actually “ones who “separate from”. They became known as dissenters (ones who dissent) and will foster later dissenters and or reformers (i.e. John Wycliffe & Jan Hus). Other movements/groups like the Anabaptists (re-baptizers), Puritans, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Brethren will often trace their religious heritage to this group and the Waldensian's consider themselves descendants of the Apostles more so than the Catholic Church. A key thing to remember about the Waldensian's were that they did not choose to reform the Catholic Church but they chose to separate from it and they were persecuted for that conscious choice!

8. **1215 AD:** The **Magna Carta** (Great paper) was written. It is sometimes called The Great Charter of Freedom and begins to set the stage for a cry for personal, social and religious freedom!
9. **1232 AD:** Persecutions by the Church against dissenters that they label as heretics will intensify through a series of various “inquisitions”. These inquisitions will continue for centuries. We will look at two of these men (**John Wycliffe & Jan Hus**) who were labeled as heretics by the Catholic Church but to many others they are considered Heroes for they championed the cause of Truth!
10. Before we do that – here are a few other dates to tuck away in your memory banks:
- **1431:** Joan of Arc is burned at the stake as a heretic
  - **1453:** Constantinople falls
  - **1456:** Gutenberg produces the first printed Bible
  - **1488:** First complete Hebrew Old Testament
  - **1512:** Michelangelo completes Sistine Chapel frescoes
  - **1516:** Erasmus publishes Greek New Testament
  - **1534:** The Church of England separates from the Roman Catholic Church
11. The events surrounding the split between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church will set in motion the beginning of the English Reformation

## **Champions of Truth (A.D. 1300-1500)**

### **1. John Wycliffe (1320-1384)**

- Background information
  - 1) He was born in Yorkshire, England and his official birth year is up for debate but most conclude it was somewhere between; 1320-1324.
  - 2) He was educated at **Oxford** and was influenced by several great minds one of which was Roger Bacon (Early promoter of the Scientific Method).
  - 3) While at Oxford, Wycliffe developed an interest in Biblical studies and obtained a BA degree in Theology and then became a Doctor of Theology.
- Conflicts with the Roman Catholic Church
  - 1) The more he learned about Theology the more he saw the need for reform within the Catholic Church.
  - 2) He (Wycliffe) authored several documents on Systematic Theology and other Biblical teachings (i.e. the Church and its leaders should be poor like the Apostles) which caused some significant ripples in the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Church which began to cause dissention and ultimately charges of heretical teaching.
  - 3) Much of the strife was centered on the ecclesiastical stronghold that the Catholic Church held over its common people.
  - 4) Due to what Wycliffe deemed was error in Catholic teaching, he set out to publish his own version (based in Scripture) of the Doctrine of the Church.
  - 5) This led to further attacks from the Catholic Church but also aided in other dissenters like Jan Hus to continue the work of reform that Wycliffe began.

- John Wycliffe's most significant contribution to Christianity was the translation of the Scriptures into English – **The Wycliffe Bible**
  - 1) This translation was completed in **1384** and was considered an unauthorized version by the Church.
  - 2) It was translated from Jerome's Latin Vulgate to English
  - 3) There are 180 copies of this Bible in existence today
  - 4) *Just as a side note; the first English Translation (though not complete) of the Scripture from the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) was the Tyndale Bible in 1525 AD.*
- Other significant factoids about John Wycliffe
  - 1) He will hold to the same doctrine of "**justification by faith**" that later reformers like Martin Luther & Zwingli will embrace and promote.
  - 2) He believed the \_\_\_\_\_ was the fundamental source of Christianity
  - 3) He held to the belief that without the knowledge of the Bible there can be no \_\_\_\_\_ in the life of the Church or of society, and outside of it there is no real and abiding good; it is the one \_\_\_\_\_ for the faith.
  - 4) He will die (of natural causes) December 28, 1384 and upon his death the Hussite movement led by Jan Huss will begin to explode in Western Europe.
  - 5) *The official Church position at the time labeled him as a heretic and the Council of Constance (May 4, 1415) decreed that his books be burned and his remains exhumed!*

## 2. Jan Hus (1369-1415 AD)

- Background information:
  - 1) He was born in Husinec (southwest of Prague, Czechoslovakia – the area was then known as Bohemia) and he is also known as **John Huss**.
  - 2) Jan Hus will begin to support many of the teachings of John Wycliffe and this will put him at odds with the Catholic Church who will label him a **heretic**.
  - 3) Jan Hus and his followers were excommunicated by the Church
- Jan Hus was outspoken on several issues being promoted by the Catholic Church:
  - 1) He was against \_\_\_\_\_ – the payment for the absolution of sins
  - 2) He was against the use of \_\_\_\_\_ for political and financial gain
  - 3) He was outspoken against the use of the papacy and religious hierarchy to control people. He considered their purpose to instruct people in the ways of God not force them into it.
- **Hus was arrested and ordered to recant his positions especially on the silly notion that Jesus Christ was the head of the Church instead of the Pope.**
  - 1) Hus never recanted and eventually was burned at the stake
  - 2) At his execution he was noted for singing; *“Christ Son of the Living God, have mercy on me”*.
- 3. In spite of this wicked movement to silence the Truth – Jan Hus spawned a movement that led to a significant transformation known as the \_\_\_\_\_ Reformation!
- 4. **Ironically** - *On December 18, 1999, Pope John Paul II apologized for the execution of Jan Hus, but has refused to pardon him despite having adopted many of his then controversial teachings.....a fitting tribute to the strong conviction of the teaching of Biblical Truth by Jan Hus!*