

St Andrew
STAPLEFORD

Heresies

Why they matter & how to avoid them

Over four weeks we will be considering four of the most famous heresies, and why they still matter to us today.

The biblical passages in this booklet are from the *New International Version (UK)*. The other quotations are from *Heresies and How to Avoid Them: why it matters what Christians believe* (2007) edited by Ben Quash & Michael Ward.

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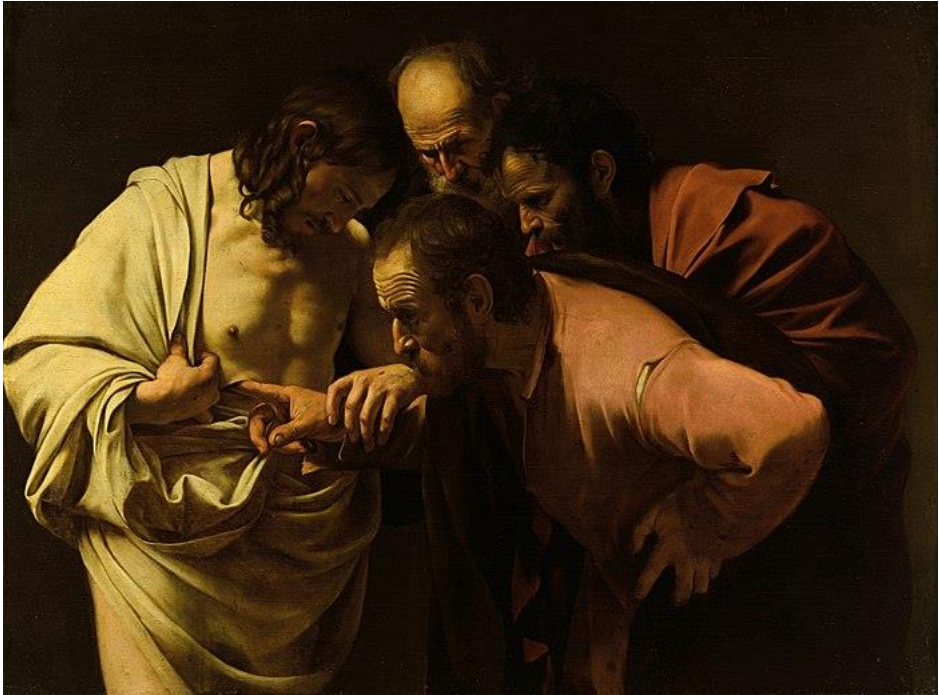
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WEEK 1 / 29 September: Arianism

Is Jesus Christ divine and eternal, or was he created?



The Incredulity of St Thomas – *Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) c.1602*
Sanssouci Picture Gallery, Potsdam

Arianism is the heresy that denies the full divinity of Jesus Christ.

It is named after Arius, who was born about 270 and died in 336. He was a priest at one of the principal churches at Alexandria in Egypt. He appears to have believed that the Son of God was not eternal, but was created before the ages by the Father as an instrument for making the world.

Arius' teaching was opposed chiefly by Athanasius, a deacon at Alexandria, and was eventually condemned by the First Ecumenical Council, held at Nicaea in 325. It became an article of 'Nicene' orthodoxy that the Father and the Son were equally eternal, and the famous term homoousios ('of the same substance') was used to express this belief.

Philippians 2.5-11

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death –
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

John 20.19-29

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!'

But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'

²⁸ Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

WEEK 2 / 13 October: Docetism

Is Jesus Christ really human, or did he just appear to be so?



Jesus Wept – James Tissot (1836-1902) 1886-1894
Brooklyn Museum, New York

Docetism is the heresy which denies the full humanity of Jesus Christ. The name comes from the Greek verb *dokein*, which means ‘to seem’.

Docetists held that Jesus only seemed to be human. This belief became particularly prominent in the second century, especially among the Gnostics, but was a tendency in theological thought rather than a fully formulated doctrine,

which helps explain why it is not named after an individual. However, by the fourth century this tendency led one Apollinarius of Laodicea (c.310–c.390) explicitly to deny that Jesus possessed a human mind or soul, and this particular kind of Docetism became known as Apollinarianism.

It was ruled to be heretical by the Second Ecumenical Council, held at Constantinople in 381.

Genesis 1.26-27

²⁶ Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’

²⁷ So God created humankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

John 11.32-37

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ 'Where have you laid him?' he asked.

'Come and see, Lord,' they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'

³⁷ But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

WEEK 3 / 27 October: Donatism

Do Christian ministers need to be faultless for their ministry to be effective?



The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares – *Domenico Fetti (1588-1623) 1620s*
Prague Castle, Prague

Donatism is the schismatic heresy which holds that the Church must remain 'holy' according to Donatist rather than catholic standards, and that sacraments conferred by those deemed to be 'unholy' are invalid.

It arose in North Africa in the early fourth century and is named after Donatus, a bishop whom the Donatists supported in opposition to Caecilian, whose consecration they objected to because his consecrator, Felix of Aptunga, had been a *traditor* (that is, one who handed over church property) during the persecution of Christians under the Roman Emperor Diocletian (284-305).

The Donatists were opposed chiefly by Augustine of Hippo, who maintained that the unworthiness of the minister does not affect the validity of the sacraments, since their true minister is Christ. The Donatists were condemned by the Council of Arles in 314.

Leviticus 19.1-2, 11-12, 17-19

¹ The Lord said to Moses, ² ‘Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy....

¹¹ Do not steal.

Do not lie.

Do not deceive one another.

¹² Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord....

¹⁷ Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbour frankly so that you will not share in their guilt.

¹⁸ Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.

¹⁹ Keep my decrees.

Do not mate different kinds of animals.

Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed.

Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.””

Matthew 13.24-30

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ ‘The owner’s servants came to him and said, “Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?”

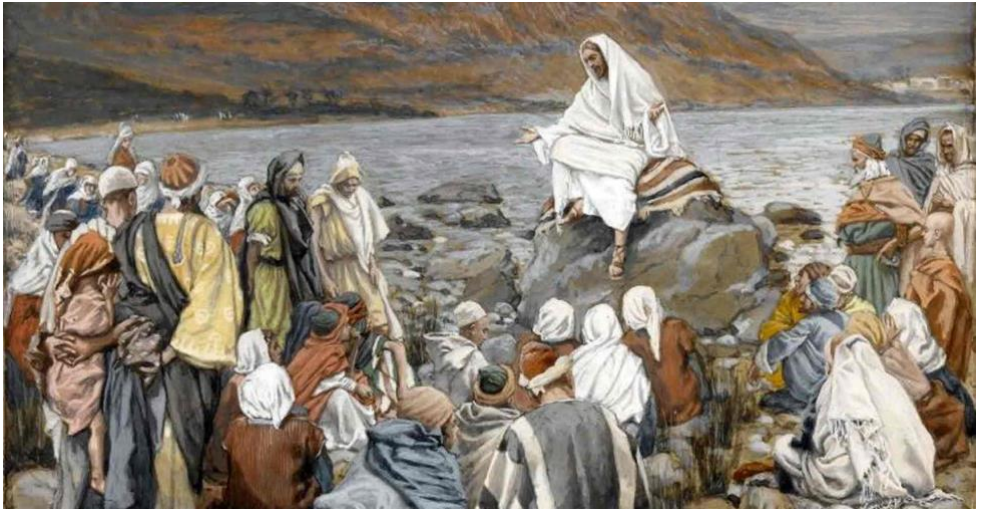
²⁸ ““An enemy did this,” he replied.

‘The servants asked him, “Do you want us to go and pull them up?”

²⁹ ““No,” he answered, “because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.””

WEEK 4 / 17 November: Pelagianism

Can people be saved by their own efforts?



Jesus Teaches the People by the Sea – *James Tissot (1836-1902) 1886-1896*
Brooklyn Museum, New York

Pelagianism is the heresy which implicitly denies the existence of original sin and asserts that people can take the initial steps towards salvation by their own efforts, choosing the good by virtue of their created natures.

It is named after Pelagius, a British theologian who taught in Rome in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.

Pelagianism was opposed chiefly by Augustine of Hippo, and was officially condemned by Zosimus, the bishop of Rome, in 418.

Romans 3.9-12, 19-28

⁹ What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. ¹⁰ As it is written:

‘There is no one righteous, not even one;

¹¹ there is no one who understands;

there is no one who seeks God.

¹² All have turned away,

they have together become worthless;

there is no one who does good,

not even one.’

...

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished ²⁶ – he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. ²⁷ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the ‘law’ that requires faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

Mark 7.14-23

¹⁴ Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, ‘Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵ Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.’ ¹⁶ If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.

¹⁷ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸ ‘Are you so dull?’ he asked. ‘Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? ¹⁹ For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.’ (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)

²⁰ He went on: 'What comes out of a person is what defiles them. ²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person.'



Heresies and How to Avoid Them

Why it matters what Christians believe

Foreword by Stanley Hauerwas

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St Augustine of Hippo Refuting a Heretic
– from a C13th Book of Hours
The Pierpoint Morgan Library, New York