



Keswick

Ministries

HEARING · BECOMING · SERVING



Grateful for Past Battles





1. Creation: God...and everything else



John 1:1-18



Creation

Battling for primary truths...

- We're looking at key battles for God's truth, against what comes to be known as 'heresy'
- Heresy isn't just being wrong. It's specific: it applies to internal threats which the Church has identified as unacceptable, which get things of first importance wrong.



Creation

i) 'Creation'

- What is it? Not just an event, but God's action as the One who makes, upholds and transcends everything that is not God.
- When we speak of 'creation', we're talking about the relationship between God and everything else.



Creation

ii) If matter doesn't really matter...

- Struggling to cope with John 1:14; see 1 John 4:2-3.
- *Docetism*, teaching that Jesus only *seemed* human.
Adoptionism, denying that Jesus is anything more than human.



Creation

iii) Marcion: Disgust at the Old Testament

- Marcion of Sinope (d. 160 AD), a real threat, taking his scissors to the Bible. Considered the Old Testament unworthy. Argued that the Father of Jesus is a different God from the OT Creator God.



Creation

iv) Gnosticism: the promise of secret knowledge

- Many different 'Gnostic' schools and groups. Prized secrecy, so hard to figure out their teaching. Creation as the work of a lower divine being. Salvation about being saved *from* creation.
- Gnosticism as a movement is dead, but the temptation to despise creation remains.



Creation

v) Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 202 AD): a faithful witness

- *Salvation as 'recapitulation'*, Jesus in His flesh-and-blood humanity summing up and fulfilling all that went before. Salvation is OF and IN creation!
- *Scripture needs to be rightly handled*: we can't pick and choose the bits we like, and we can't interpret individual verses in a way that cuts against the whole teaching of Scripture.
- *The Church as witness*: Irenaeus identifies Gnostic movements as a threat on the basis of what the Church taught and believed. Consider the 'Rule of Faith', a summary of the Gospel which developed from early Baptism services, and became the basis of later creeds.







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2. Trinity: who God is in Himself



Matthew 3:13-17; 28:16-20



Trinity

Battling for full truths...

- Heresy is about half-truths. They have real traction, because they are often grounded in some true aspect of the Gospel—but never the whole truth.



Trinity

i) Where the doctrine of the Trinity came from

- This is a Bible reality and a Baptism reality.
- But how do we understand the three-in-one nature of God?



Trinity

ii) Two ways to go wrong...

- Sabellianism, or modalism: 'Father', 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit' are modes in which the one person of God manifests Himself.
- Arianism, or subordinationism: the Father is fully God: the Son and the Holy Spirit are divine, but not equal to God by nature. The Father made them, and through them made everything else.
- The problem: in neither case does Jesus fully reveal God, nor can He bring us all the way in to the life of God.



Trinity

iii) How to speak of the Triune God: Nicaea (325 AD) and Constantinople (381 AD)

- Paul of Samosata, condemned in 268 AD. Probably held to modalist views.
- Arius of Alexandria (d. 336 AD): 'There was a time when the Son was not.' Views condemned at Nicaea, but followed by others (notably Eunomius of Cyzicus).
- Alexander of Alexandria (d. 328 AD): 'Always Father, always Son'.
- Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373 AD): fought for the term *homoousios*.



Trinity

iii) How to speak of the Triune God: Nicaea (325 AD) and Constantinople (381 AD)

- The Cappadocian Fathers, Basil of Caesarea (d. 379 AD), Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 390 AD), Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395 AD): distinguished between God's one being (*ousia*) and three persons (*hypostases*).
- Notice: the importance of language outside Scripture to clarify, define and defend the truth of Scripture.



Trinity

iv) How we can go wrong

- 1 John 2:23: this is a salvation issue, not because the Trinity is an exam we have to pass, but because salvation happens in the Trinity.
- Deny the One, and reality is chaos. Deny the Three, and reality is barren. That's why half-truths are so dangerous!
- We need to rejoice in how God's triune nature makes sense of everything (e.g. creation and love) without trying to make this doctrine the battleground for other issues. Only in conspiracy theories does everything have to go 'all the way to the top'!



Trinity

iv) How we can go wrong

- This doctrine is one that comes alive in our worship and prayer.
- Gregory of Nazianzus: 'No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One.' (Oration 40.41)





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3. Jesus: fully God, fully Man



Philippians 2:5-12



Incarnation

Reminder: all Christians are sinners saved by grace

- Battling for God's truth is not about easily-identified heroes and villains; this history is full of mess and conflict on both sides.
- But an important principle is *lex orandi, lex credendi*: the way Christians prayed and worshipped was instrumental in showing them the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable.



Incarnation

i) Two natures

- As in Philippians 2, we have to make sense of Jesus' two natures. Scripture identifies Him as divine, and it identifies Him as human. How do we speak of Him faithfully?



Incarnation

ii) Whatever is unassumed is unhealed

- Apollinaris of Laodicea (d. 382 AD). Fervent supporter of Nicaea against Arius, but was condemned at Constantinople. Held that the incarnate Jesus had no human soul, but that the divine *Logos* replaced it.
- Gregory of Nazianzus: 'The unassumed is unhealed'. If Jesus isn't fully human, then our full humanity cannot be saved.



Incarnation

iii) Nestorius, Cyril and Ephesus (430 AD): separating the natures

- Is Mary *Theotokos* (God-bearer)? Or is she *Christotokos* (Christ-bearer) or *Anthropotokos* (Man-bearer)? Nestorius (d. 450 AD), one-time Bishop of Constantinople, rejected *Theotokos* because he wanted to safeguard the divine nature of God from involvement in human processes (birth and death). This ended up effectively treating Jesus as two persons, the divine Son and the human Jesus of Nazareth.
- Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444 AD) disputed this: keeping the divine and human natures separate in the Incarnation threatens our salvation. There are two natures, but they are united in Jesus' one person.



Incarnation

- iii) Nestorius, Cyril and Ephesus (430 AD): separating the natures**
- So when Jesus stoops to die for us, He is not 'less divine' when He stoops: as fully God and fully Man He suffers for our salvation. Calling Mary *Theotokos* isn't really about Mary. It's saying something about Jesus: from the very beginning of His incarnate life in Mary's womb, Jesus is fully divine.
 - Nestorius' position was rejected at the Council of Ephesus in 430 AD.



Incarnation

iv) Eutyches and Chalcedon: One WHO, Two WHATS

- Eutyches (d. 456 AD), a follower of Cyril who took anti-Nestorianism too far. He fused the two natures until they were totally joined: after the incarnation, Christ has just one divine-human nature. What kind of salvation is possible for us if our humanity is done away with?
- The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) sought resolution with a carefully balanced definition, holding that when we talk of the incarnate Jesus, we identify one *who* (the person of the Son of God) and two *whats* (the divine nature and the human nature which the Son assumed), that He is 'acknowledged in Two Natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation'.



Incarnation

iv) Eutyches and Chalcedon: One WHO, Two WHATS

- When the Word became flesh, the divine nature wasn't changed into human nature (God can't change!) but these two were joined in the one person of the Son.
- This is Philippians 2: the Son's 'emptying' (when he 'made himself nothing', as some translations put it) happens not in Him *losing* any properties, but in *taking on* a new nature, the 'form of a servant'.





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4. Salvation: what sinners really need



Matthew 6:7-15; 9:9-13



Salvation

Why this matters...

- Truth is not an optional extra...this is a matter of salvation.
- Heresy is cruel. There's a reason why false teaching is so completely condemned by the New Testament. Heresies are false teachings which lead people astray in things of first importance, cutting them off from Jesus.



Salvation

i) Matters of salvation

- In many ways, all these heresies so far jeopardise salvation. The idea that we're saved from creation (as in Gnosticism) means that we aren't really saved. The idea that Jesus isn't fully God (denying the Trinity) means he can't reveal God or bring us to God. The idea that Jesus isn't fully divine and fully human means he can't be a mediator between God and humanity.



Salvation

ii) What's gone wrong?

- Sin has had ruinous effects. But how do we understand the brokenness of our world? Manichaeism, a heresy initiating its members into the teachings of Mani (a 3rd C. Persian teacher who claimed to be the Holy Spirit).
- While using Christian Scriptures, Mani discerned two ultimate principles in the universe, light and darkness as equal and opposite. God had a cosmic and co-eternal rival. Thus, evil has substance, is something that exists as a real presence in our world: it belongs to creation.



Salvation

ii) What's gone wrong?

- Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) was once part of this shadowy sect, but was left unsatisfied by its teachings. On the question of evil, he was persuaded by the Christian teaching that evil has no substance, has no positive existence of itself.
- Evil is a privation of the good, rather than something that has a foothold in reality. Though its origins are a great mystery, evil originates in wills that choose to rebel against God.



Salvation

iii) How salvation works and what part we play

- Augustine wrote his brilliant and influential *Confessions*, in which he asked God, 'Grant what you command, and command what you will'. A British monk, Pelagius (d. 418 AD), was scandalised by this.
- He wanted to challenge Christians to live holier and holier lives, unimpressed by the lax living he saw in Rome. He taught that perfection was possible for Christians, and rejected Augustine's position as setting too low a standard.



Salvation

iii) How salvation works and what part we play

- Augustine resisted Pelagius, reasoning from the Lord's Prayer that if we are commanded to pray 'forgive us our sins', it follows that a struggle against sin will always be a feature of life until Jesus returns. Pelagius' can-do attitude reflects a real cruelty.
- Augustine's stern insistence on original sin (our total helplessness at the level of will and resistance to the good as something humanity inherits in Adam) is much kinder, able to recognise the frailty of human nature. Pelagius is full of confidence in the power of the human will; Augustine is all too aware that sin warps and weakens our wills.



Salvation

iv) What kind of Saviour is Jesus?

- Pelagius' teachings were condemned at the Council of Ephesus along with Nestorius'. But his ideas have always been popular, and the struggle between his position and Augustine's has continued in different forms for centuries.
- The Reformation, with its insistence on salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, saw itself as firmly on Augustine's side of things.



Salvation

iv) What kind of Saviour is Jesus?

- The question: how does Jesus save? Does He do it as an example we are called to imitate—or by rescuing us through His death and resurrection?
- And what of community is His body, the church: a gym for the morally and spiritually attractive—or a hospital for those sick with sin?

