

Heresy and the Modern Church



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Heresy is a word we don't hear much in the modern church anymore. As time goes on it seems to be relegated to the linguistic trash heap of history. Speak the word heresy amongst a group of Christians and you are likely to draw some interesting looks. Some are obviously confused as to what the word even is, others are scared that it may be used to condemn others (personally or doctrinally), and some just prefer to avoid any word that may indicate a controversy is about to start. Yet the word was not shied away

from throughout the history of the church. It was used if and where it was found to be an appropriate designation of what was happening and in no way did the church shy away from using it. The word is certainly used in our bibles with Tit. 3:10 being a primary example of it. So, why is it the modern church is so reluctant to use the word?

I think, for starters, the modern church by and large doesn't even know what the word means. I heard a man recently calling Christ Himself a heretic as if that would be some sort of demented badge of honor. Obviously someone using the word in such a manner doesn't have a religious view of the word. So what does it mean? Dictionary.com says that a heretic is one who is "a professed believer who maintains religious opinions contrary to those accepted by his or her church or rejects doctrines prescribed by that church; does not conform to an established attitude, doctrine, or principle." That's a

fine definition in part; but, it doesn't fully grasp the concept of what a heretic is. By that definition a malcontent of any sort may be a heretic; or, for that matter, someone with a dissenting opinion in any matter may be a heretic. By such a standard the word would perhaps be best suited to the aforementioned linguistic trash heap. But that is a fairly secular view of the word. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 4thEd. does a better job of it and says a heretic is a "schismatic, apostate, sectarian." Their use of the word apostate is especially important. Mix that with Strong's definition that a heretic is "a follower of a false doctrine" and the view becomes clearer. You can't use this word without a view of orthodoxy, it just won't work. *Orthos* – correct and *doxa* – belief; right doctrine. So then, heresy is any doctrine that opposes the "correct doctrine" of God as revealed to us through His word.

Now I believe we can focus in on where the disuse of this word has come from. As the church, the modern church specifically, has continued to drift further away from orthodox positions, it has been less important that heresy would be identified. In fact, it was to their advantage that it was not identified at all. For if an intentional shift away from the orthodox position of the church is occurring; then it is not advantageous for anyone to be called a heretic, for that may affect that shift. Better not to bruise a conscience where we are seeking to abandon conscience altogether!

Yet orthodoxy is the very heart beat of the church. God gave us His inerrant word that we would use it as our rule of faith and life. If we abandon the doctrines presented there in we fail. Christ said, "[...] a house divided against a house falls" (Lu. 11:17). So we cannot proclaim we are of Christ and at the same time deny His word. For once we deny His word we are heretics; from there on we have started to preach another doctrine. Christ stood opposed to the cancerous practices of the religious norm in his day. But, more importantly, they stood against Christ who had prescribed to them what religion is and what it should be. In no way can Christ, who is the essence of religion, the chief cornerstone, be a heretic. The Jewish establishment was practicing heresy and Christ corrected them. Christ established religion and he stands sure in what He has established and so must the church.

Earlier Tit. 3:10 was mentioned. In that verse we are told that after we have tried to recover a heretic we are to reject him entirely. The original word in the Greek is *hairesikos* and is properly rendered *heretic* in the English as was done in the KJV, 1599

Geneva Bible, and the Amplified. We can't change the word to divisive or factious simply because heretic has become uncomfortable for us. We are to stand for the orthodoxy of the church... this is the truth. When men arise, specifically within her ranks, and start teaching heresy we are obligated to call them out and to reject them. Yes, we must strive for those that would espouse these doctrines; but, we cannot be afraid to call a heretic what he is and reject him should he refuse to repent. Failure to do so has led to much ruin in the church and the evidence cannot be denied. The modern church is a shell of her former glory and unless men of conviction are willing to stand up for the truth and defend her with vigor she will continue her decadent descent. Orthodoxy matters, thus heresy must matter too.