

Jones, Timothy Paul

Christian History Made Easy Participant Guide

8. Session 2: Defending the Truth (AD 100–300)

Facing persecution from outside and false teaching from within, the early church had to settle what a Christian actually believes about Jesus. This session lays out four heresies that distorted who Jesus was, and the three tools the church used to guard the true gospel.

Key takeaways

- Four false views of Jesus: Ebionites (human Messiah, not divine); Docetists (only seemed to have a body); Gnostics (secret knowledge saves, physical world is evil); Marcionism (the Old and New Testament Gods are two different deities).
- The church answered with three responses: the canon (Scripture), a confession of faith, and centralized authority (bishops tracing teaching back to the apostles).
- A writing entered the canon by eyewitness test: could it be traced to an eyewitness of the risen Jesus or a close associate, was it accepted by other congregations, and did it agree with texts of undoubted apostolic origin.

- The Muratorian Fragment is the oldest known list of New Testament books; the Apostles' Creed grew out of questions asked at baptism.
- The stakes were survival of the true gospel, not academic debate — denying Jesus came 'in the flesh' was treated as marking a false teacher.

Passages worth keeping

“Whoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is antichrist.”

Polycarp quoting the apostle John — the flesh-and-blood reality of Jesus was the dividing line against Docetism and Gnosticism.

How it connects

The heresies each denied part of who Jesus is; the canon and creed exist to hold together what Scripture already teaches — one Spirit behind the four Gospels and the whole Bible (1 Peter 1:20–21).

Scripture referenced

- **Galatians 5:1–6** -- against the Ebionite error that law-keeping makes one right with God; freedom in Christ, faith working through love
- **John 1:1–18** -- Jesus as God in human flesh, refuting Ebionism
- **Philippians 2:5–11** -- the full deity and humanity of Christ

- **2 Timothy 3:16-17** -- Scripture is God-breathed — the Spirit unifies all the books
- **Revelation 22:18-19** -- warning against adding to or removing from God's Word; why Marcion's edits were rejected