

Discussion Questions on Craig Blomberg's

"The New Testament Definition of Heresy (Or When do Jesus and the Apostles Really Get Mad?)"¹

BACKGROUND

adiaphora: Beliefs not essential to salvation, such as practices not addressed by Scripture.

QUESTIONS

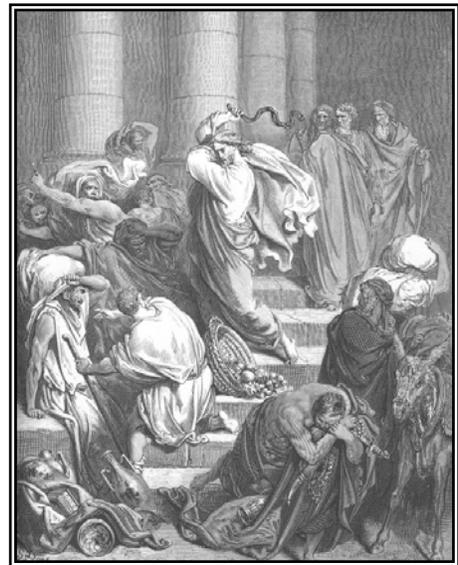
1. Referring to your chart of parable summaries, what beliefs and actions most anger Jesus? Which place one's salvation in jeopardy?
2. Blomberg attempts to determine what the apostles and for Jesus considered most heinous He summarizes his findings as follows:²

Beliefs:

- Deviation from the full divinity or humanity of Christ
- Legalism, nomism, ethnocentrism; anything less than salvation by grace through faith
- "One must submit to the resurrected Jesus as total master (Rom 10:9-10) and exhibit the fruit befitting repentance."
- Doubting Christ's return
- Defeatism, triumphalism or perfectionism

Behaviors:

- Antinomianism
- Immorality, from asceticism to hedonism
- Factiousness
- Lack of stewardship of one's material possessions
- Ritual placed above morality



(See handout for details.)

Blomberg's method is to scan the NT for the things which got Jesus and the apostles het-up. What weaknesses does this approach have? Is there anything you would add? What criteria does he give for discerning priorities?

3. List the beliefs and actions which are opposed most vigorously by the American evangelical church at large, and the CRC in particular. (See handout for some starting ideas.)
4. What, if any, beliefs or issues do *you* consider serious enough to prompt action, from choosing a church in the first place, to leaving a church, disciplining a church member, participating in a church split or leaving a denomination? How does your list compare with those from questions 1 and 3?

¹ *Journal of the Evan. Theol. Soc.* 45, 59, 2002.

² From the early church we could add *Montanism* (elevation of revelation above Scripture), a smorgasbord of Trinitarian and Christological heresies, *Pelagianism* (Jesus gave us the ability to earn our own salvation), "*Puritanism*" (exclusion from the church of those who deny Christ under persecution) and others.

5. What are the four reasons Blomberg gives for Paul's vehement opposition to the Judaizers in Galatians (p. 66)? Are these factors present for the issues you consider most dangers or worth opposing? Is this a useful set of criteria for identifying truly dangerous heresies? Which if any of the list from questions 3 and 4 are weeded out by these criteria?

6. Blomberg points to an interesting juxtaposition in Philippians:

Those two clearest [adversaries] include the rival teachers of 1:15-18, whose motives are bad but whose content is good, and thus Paul, perhaps surprisingly to us, can still rejoice. Conversely, Judaizers appear here too, and come in once again for harsh rebuke (3:2-4:1). They may well have been quite sincere, but when the message is so wrong, it cannot be tolerated. [p. 68-69]

Does this help in ordering your list from question 4?

7. Blomberg concludes with this warning:

In short, our tendency has been to fight our fiercest battles at the theological periphery of evangelicalism, where we believe the limits of tolerance have been exceeded. We rarely ask who in our midst may be equally misguided (and possible even more dangerous) because they have drawn the boundaries too narrowly rather than too broadly. As Arland Hultgren's survey of the earliest eras of Church history reminds us, one can become heretical by being either too broad-minded or too narrow-minded.

Both Titus and 1 Corinthians condemn factiousness; Tit 3:10-11 says "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned." How well do we balance the mandate to avoid division with exclusion of false teaching and those who don't truly want to follow Christ? Did Jesus emphasize one over the other?

8. Thomas Oden describes heresy as follows:

Heresy is less the assertion of statements directly hostile to classic Christian faith than it is the assertion of fragments of apostolic teaching, an assertion of segments that lack the cohesion and wholeness of classic Christian faith. Heresy occurs when some legitimate dimension of faith is elevated so unsymmetrically and so out of equilibrium as to become a decisive principle of interpretation for all other aspects of faith. To do so denies the unity and equilibrium of the ancient ecumenical consensus. Every *hairesis* against apostolic testimony gives the church a new opportunity to clarify the equilibrium of faith of the ancient Christian apostolic consensus.³

Do you agree? Is this useful for setting priorities among heresies?



☞ *Fun quotation:* "I... entreat you that ye use Christian nourishment only, and abstain from herbage of a different kind; I mean heresy. For those [that are given to this] mix up Jesus Christ with their own poison, speaking things which are unworthy of credit, like those who administer a deadly drug in sweet wine, which he who is ignorant of does greedily take, with a fatal pleasure leading to his own death. For there are some vain talkers... [who] intermix the poison of their deceit with their persuasive talk, as if they mingled aconite⁴ with sweet wine, that so he who drinks, being deceived in his taste by the very great sweetness of the draught, may incautiously meet with his death."

—Ignatius, d. 98/117, *Epistle to the Trallians*, 6:1-2; written from prison, before death by wild beasts

³ "Can We Talk About Heresy", *Christian Century*, Apr. 12, 1995, p. 390.

⁴ The dried poisonous tuberous root of a common monkshood used especially for its relieving pain.