

So That You May Know

An Expositional Study of the Epistle of **1 John 5:6-8**

Chapter 26- Understanding and Valuing the Doctrine of the Trinity

236 Our Triune God Part 8

WAOY Tuesday 08/19/08

Welcome again, my beloved in Jesus Christ. We're continuing our verse by verse "journey" through the Epistle of **1John**, and today we're going to continue to look at what John taught about "The Doctrine of the Trinity". So let's open our Bibles and read **1John 5:6-8**- again together:

6 This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

7 For there are three that testify:

8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

Now on the last broadcast- we were going over just how important it is for the Church to know and to rightly preach Who Jesus is. For almost five chapters- the Apostle John has been teaching us that there are four things that are essential to being a Christian:

1. Love of God and for God
2. Keeping God's Commandments
3. Loving the Brethren
4. A Correct Understanding of Who Jesus is

Now on the last broadcast- we were going over a time in Church History when the Christian Faith almost lost its understanding of Who Jesus is. This time is called the "Arian Controversy" and it involves a battle within the Church over the Deity of Jesus Christ.

As we discovered last time- the Church in the Fourth Century was enjoying unprecedented prosperity and peace. Constantine- the Emperor of Rome had in effect legalized Christianity and the Church

was no longer being persecuted by the pagan Roman Government.

And the Peace and Prosperity that resulted from this action took hold on the average Christian of that day and the people of God became very laid back and relaxed as they accumulated more of this world's goods. Like today, people were so busy making more money and buying more things and enjoying life and so very few had any time to study the Bible; or minister to the sick; or go on Missions; or Pray. The last thing that anybody felt led to do during that time was too fast and seek God's Face and defend the Truth against wrong teaching.

And like today- the goal of the Church was to hang on to their possessions and to accumulate more prestige and to become more acclimated to the lost world rather than to count this life as nothing in exchange for a home in Glory.

And just like today- the result of God's people being lax about Truth was that false teaching and evil doctrines began to rush into the Church- that were designed to encourage God's people to sleep on while the world was on fire.

And one of those false teachings that entered into the Church during this time is called "Arianism". Now Arianism was named after the evil man who brought it into the House of God- Arius- a very tall, handsome charismatic and well- spoken man who could captivate a room with his personality and poise. Arius could speak eloquently for hours without notes and many considered him to be the man of the hour.

And like many of the false teachers of our day- Arius said that he had heard directly from God and had received Divine Revelation directly from God which said that Jesus was not really God Almighty in human flesh but was merely an elevated and glorified Man- Who was to be respected and admired- but never worshipped. Arius taught that God had created Jesus at some point during Creation.

Now the net effect of Arius's false teaching was that Jesus was not Deity; and therefore should not be worshipped. Arius then went on to say that The Doctrine of the Trinity was also false because it elevated Jesus to being God wrapped in human flesh. Now the fact that what Arius taught contradicted many, many verses of Scripture didn't seem to bother him nor any of his followers and it is assumed by historians that the reason that a teaching which so blatantly disregards Scripture didn't seem objectionable to the Church was because the Church was

willing during the fourth Century to trade Doctrinal purity for their new found peace and prosperity.

Many leaders within the Church during the fourth Century sounded like many Church leaders today as they continued to downplay the importance of Biblical Truth and uphold whatever made the Church richer and more influential with the Government. Constantine- the Emperor of Rome- had great success in all his military endeavors during this time and he attributed his successes to the Christian God.

So in response to the Roman Empire's new found success and prosperity- Constantine began to actively participate in the Church services. He said that since Christ had given him military and political success- Christ would now give the Church a new era of peace and prosperity.

But when the Roman Emperor went into the Church, he found that the Church was greatly divided over a Doctrinal issue about the Deity of Jesus Christ. The Arian Controversy was threatening to split the Church apart. And this greatly grieved Constantine and perplexed him that Christ's Church could be divided like this.

The controversy centered around Arius, who had recently been ordained as a presbyter in the Church at Alexandria Egypt in A.D. 311, which was one year before Constantine's supposed conversion.

And Arius comes unto the scene here dressed as "an angel of light". His *first* attempt at Doctrine was to do battle against an earlier false teaching called "Modalism" and to make sure that the Church successfully defended itself against *that* heresy. And that was a good thing. But Arius soon turned from being this "angel of light" and "defender of the Faith" into the real devil that he was.

And now we need to meet the second character of this real life drama- a man named Alexander. Alexander was the godly arch- bishop of the Church in Alexandria Egypt and he had promoted Arius to being a presbyter precisely because of his wonderful work that he had done in putting down the heresy of the Modalists. Arius and Alexander enjoyed great fellowship and huge success together for about seven years after Arius' promotion.

But sometime around the year A.D 319 or 320, Arius heard Alexander teaching that Jesus shared the very same Nature as the Father. Alexander was teaching that while it was true that Jesus and the Father were different *Persons* of the one true Godhead- Alexander

rightly taught that God the father and God the Son were still “one” in Essence and “one” in Substance.

Now like many today- Arius really didn’t comprehend the Doctrine of the Trinity correctly, and so he accused Alexander of teaching Modalism- which just wasn’t true. And Arius said that the only way to truly defeat Modalism was to teach that Jesus was of a *similar* but completely *different* “Essence” or “Substance” than the Father.

Alexander countered by saying that the true Doctrine of the Trinity was enough to reject the error of Modalism and that Jesus was indeed different from the Father in Person and in Function, but that the Church *had* to teach that Christ has the very same Nature and Essence of the Father because there is only one God and the Bible clearly taught that Jesus was God.

So Arius made a common error that many make today. We must be careful that we do not overreact to one heresy by creating another one. That is why we need to be careful to teach exactly what the Bible says and not take anything away from what it says or add anything to it. The Bible is just fine the way that it is and we have to be very careful that we preach and teach and believe what the Bible actually says.

And in this case- the Modalists had taken away from what the Bible clearly taught about Christ being Deity. But Arius made the fatal mistake of *overreacting* to the false teaching of Modalism by creating a new heresy by adding to what the Bible says about Christ. And this is really not that uncommon.

We have to understand that the Bible clearly teaches many things, but many times- we tend to add things that the Bible doesn’t teach or take away things that the Bible does teach. And this “adding” and this “taking away” brings us into conflict with Scripture.

So through Arius’ effort to reject Modalism and affirm the differences of the Persons of the Godhead- Arius ended up denying the full Deity of Jesus Christ. And even when he was carefully counseled, Arius *refused* to recant. And in his refusal- Arius drifted further and further *away* from Biblical Truth about Christ and went deeper and deeper into this new heresy. Alexander tried over a series of years to bring Arius back to a correct Biblical view of the Deity of Christ, but Arius became more arrogant and more resistant to what the Bible revealed about Christ’s Divinity.

Now what is absolutely fascinating about all this- is that the Arian Controversy centered around a single Greek word. Actually, this entire heresy had to do with a single letter of a single Greek word. And so one of the most damaging heresies that the Christian Church ever fought against centered around a single letter of a single word.

No many of you are familiar with the phrase, “*there is not one iota difference between them*”. And when somebody uses that phrase- they mean that the difference between two things is very, very slight. And this phrase, that is very common today, came from this Arian Controversy of the fourth century.

Now like I said- the Controversy had to do with one letter of one Greek word that described the Nature or the Essence or the Substance of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that Jesus was of the very *same* Nature or the very same Essence or Substance as God the Father. But Arius taught that Jesus was of a *similar* but entirely different Nature or Essence or Substance.

Now the Greek word that had been used for over 400 years to describe the Deity of Jesus Christ was the Greek word, *homoousia*, which is a combination of two Greek words, *homo-* which means, “the same” and *ousia* which means, “substance/essence”. So Alexander, the arch- bishop of Alexandria, rightly taught that Jesus was *homoousia* with the Father- or that Jesus was “of the same Substance” or of the “same Essence” with God the Father. And this correlated with what Scripture taught and what the Church had already been teaching for over 4 Centuries- that Jesus was God.

But Arius added one Greek letter- the letter “I”, which in the Greek alphabet was called the “iota” to the word, *homoousia* to make it become *homoiousia*, which was a combination of two words, *homoi*, which meant, “similar” and *ousia* which meant, “substance”. So by adding just one letter to just one word- Arius had changed the Nature of Christ from being the very *same* as God the Father to being *similar but* entirely *different* from God. Now even though this change may seem insignificant to us today- the effect of what Arius taught was huge and would affect *everything*.

Because if Jesus was only *similar* to God and was not actually God Himself in human flesh- then this meant that Jesus was certainly not Deity. It would mean that Jesus was *only* Human. But if Jesus was not God- then He could not possibly be the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy

about Immanuel. And if Jesus was not God- then He could not forgive sin and that would mean that the Bible is wrong because according to **Romans 10:9** we have to confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord or that Jesus is Yahweh in human form. If Jesus is not God then Mary and Joseph were encouraging the wise men to commit idolatry because they worshipped Jesus as they gave him the gold, the frankincense and the myrrh. And if Jesus is not God- then the Bible is in error because all over the place- the Scriptures confirm that Jesus was God.

So even though Arius wanted to add just one letter to one word- the *implication* of Arius' false teaching was enormous and would change *everything* about Christianity and the Church.

If Christ was of a *similar* but different Substance than God- then either Christ was not Deity at all or else Christianity had more than one god and was not monotheistic but was polytheistic. And if Christianity was polytheistic, then Christianity could not be correct because the Old Testament clearly teaches that God is "one". So the only avenue that remained for the Arians was to teach was that Christ was *more* than a man, but was *less* than God.

But Alexander said that the Church had it right for 400 years and that Scripture declared the full Deity of Christ. And so Alexander said that unless Arius and his followers repent- the Church should excommunicate them. And so in response- Arius said that he didn't care what the Bible said and that since he was right- he asked the Church to excommunicate Alexander and his followers.

So, something had to be done. The Church couldn't leave this Controversy to itself. Either Arius was right and Jesus was not God or Alexander was right and Jesus was God- but both of them could not be right. The Church could not stay neutral on this issue and now had the responsibility and the duty to prove one man to be wrong and the other man to be right. And we will look further into this on the next broadcast because I have to stop right here, but please join me on the next broadcast as we continue our journey through the Epistle of **1John**. May God help us all.

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