



*On The Son of God
His Deity and Eternality*

By

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Teaching Notes are Bible studies we taught before GraceLife Ministries began publishing articles online in 1995. Some were presented as sermons, others as group studies.

Our hope is that these older studies will be a blessing to you in your life and ministry. Please use them in any way God leads you.

These teaching notes are part of a study about the Deity and Eternality of Jesus Christ in Church history.

[These notes are from a study taught more than 40 years ago. The notes are in outline form.]

I. Errors about Christ's Deity and Eternality

A. Past errors

Bible Books on the error

- Colossians
- Hebrews
- 1 John
- 2 John
- Jude

An Apostolic Father on the error

Ignatius of Antioch was a disciple of the Apostle John. He became Bishop of Antioch early in the second century. Jews and of his day were rejecting Christ's deity and eternity or were modifying it. In his letter to the Trillions, Ignatius warned sharply against "any talk that ignores Jesus Christ, of David's lineage, of Mary; who was really born, ate and drank." In his letter to the Smyrnaeans he called Jesus "the Christ God" and said: "He genuinely suffered, even as he genuinely raised himself ... Unbelievers who say the passion was a sham are themselves a sham."

An early faith defender on the error

Irenaeus of South Gaul was a disciple of Polycarp who had been discipled by the Apostle John. He became Bishop of Lyons in 178 AD. He took on Gnosticism of the late second century that taught the world had been created by angels and Christ was not God incarnate. In his extensive work, *Refutation and Overthrow of the Knowledge Falsely So-Called*, Irenaeus quoted the first chapter of John's Gospel as defense of Christ's deity and eternity.

An Incarnational theologian on the error

As the second and third centuries developed, the Church struggled with the issue of Christ's deity and eternity. Jewish Christians tended to think of Christ as subordinate to the Father and even, perhaps, as Son of God by adoption rather than nature or essence. Many Gentile Christians viewed Christ simply as an economic and temporary mode of the one God or they viewed Him as a finite man in whom the eternal but impersonal Word found embodiment and who in virtue of this association could be acknowledged as the Son of God.

Docetists insisted on the full deity of Christ, but because the flesh seemed to be an unworthy or impossible vehicle for God they discounted the humanity as a mere semblance.

Subordinationists, on the other hand, accepted the humanity but fell short of an authentic deity.

A young theologian in the Church at Alexandria (Athanasius) addressed the issue through a small work on the interrelated theme of incarnation and atonement entitled *The Incarnation of the Word*. About a year later, in 318 AD, the Bishop of Alexandria gave an address on the Trinity under the title of *Unity in Trinity*. One of the church's elders, Arius, responded to the bishop's address by teaching an outrageous form of subordinationism which plainly denied Christ's essential deity.

Some of the quotes from Arius' teaching are:

- "There was when the Son was not."
- "He had His essence from the non-existent."
- "He is not equal, no, nor one in essence with the Father."

This launched a much-heated controversy that lasted more than 60 years. Arianism denied that the Son was the same substance with the Father and reduced Him to the rank of a creature, though preexistent before the world. No Christological heresy of ancient Christianity was more widely accepted or tenacious. In 320 or 321 AD, the Bishop of Alexandria convened a synod of about 100 Egyptian and Lybian bishops. They excommunicated Arius and his followers. The whole Eastern Church became a metaphysical battlefield and eventually Emperor Constantine called a massive council of the Church to settle the Arian controversy.

The Council of Nicea met in 325 AD and consisted of 318 bishops. They discussed the issues and then adopted a creed known as the Nicene Creed:

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; By whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost. [But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable'—they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.]" 325AD Version

Between the Nicene Council of 325 and the Constantinople Council of 381 AD, the Church battled fiercely over the issue. There were other councils, more letters and numerous excommunications. One impartial heathen historian wrote of the time that the highways were filled with galloping bishops.

The unflinching leader of the orthodox party during that period was Athanasius whose theology was at the core of the matter. He became Bishop of Alexandria, but spent many years in exile because of the controversy. He considered the eternal divinity of Christ to be the cornerstone of the Christian system.

[An interesting sidelight to this was that while Athanasius was in exile, Emperor Constantine demanded that Arius be restored to his position in the Alexandrian Church. The day before his intended restoration, Arius suddenly died. The next year Constantine died and his son, Emperor Constantine II, recalled Athanasius from exile.]

The Council of Constantinople was convened by Emperor Theodosius the Great in 381AD to discuss the Arian controversy about the Deity of Christ and the *Pneumatomachian* controversy about the Deity of the Holy Spirit. After the Council, both heresies ceased to exist as organized moving forces in theology and Church history.

The Council of Constantinople updated the 325 Nicene Creed with this statement -

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were

made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen."

381AD Version

B. Present Errors

- Liberal or apostate churches
- Pseudo-Christian cults: Christian Science, Spiritualism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Armstrongism, Mormonism
- Eastern Mystical religions
- The *Oh! God!* Generation
- Atheism

II. Truth about Christ's Deity and Eternality

A. What the Evangelists believed about Christ

- Matthew - 4:5-7; 14:25-33
- Mark - 5:6-8; 14:55-65
- Luke - 22:66-70
- John - 1:1-5, 14-18; 5:16-18, 20-24; 8:54-59; 10:25-33 20:31

Godet in *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (1892)

"In the last part of this verse (23) Jesus thrusts a warning at those who accuse Him of blasphemy. He tells them that by hurling abuse at Him they are actually hurling it at God and that it is God who is outraged by their treatment of Jesus."

J.C. Ryle in *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (1866)

"They who profess zeal for the one God do not honor Him aright unless they honor the Son as they honor the Father."

Henry Alford in *The Greek Testament* (1868)

"All unbiased exegesis of these words must recognize in them a declaration of the essential pre-existence of Christ." (on John 8:54-59)

Frederick Spurr in *Jesus is God* (1899)

"Prefaced by the double Amen --- the strongest oath --- our Lord claims the incommunicable name of the Divine Being. The Jews recognize His meaning and horrified, they seek to stone Him."

A.T. Robertson in *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (1930)

"This crisp statement is the climax of Christ's claims concerning the relationship between the Father and himself (the Son). They stir the Pharisees to uncontrollable anger." (on John 10:25-33)

B. What the Apostle Peter believed

- Matthew 16:13-16
- Acts 2:36-39

2 Peter 1:1 (according to the strict grammatical construction of the passage, "God" and "Savior" are both predicates of "Jesus Christ.")

C. What the Apostle Paul believed

- Colossians 1:15-17
- Philippians 2:5-11
- 1 Timothy 3:14-16
- Titus 2:13

D. What the writer to the Hebrews believed

- Hebrews 1:1-14

E. What the Apostle John believed

- 1 John 2:22-23
- 1 John 4:1-3
- 2 John 7

III. Conclusions about Christ's Deity and Eternality

A. Doctrinal

- Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.
- Jesus Christ is the Eternal God.

B. Practical

Positive - In view of who Jesus Christ is we should: love Him with our whole being, worship Him as God, submit to His will for our lives, and obey His every command and teaching.

Negative - In view of the Apostolic teaching concerning false teaching about the deity and eternality of Jesus Christ, we should: separate ourselves from anyone who does not teach that Jesus came in the flesh and is the Eternal God.

a. If they are teaching in your church, they should be warned and disciplined if necessary.

b. If the leaders of your church will not do anything about the false teaching, then separate yourself from the church.

c. Warn others to not support any teacher of false doctrine lest they should share in their wicked work.

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