

# So That You May Know

## An Expository Study of the Epistle of **1 John 5:6-8** Chapter 26- Understanding and Valuing the Doctrine of the Trinity 237 Our Triune God Part 9

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WAOY Wednesday 08/20/08

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.

Now last time we saw how that the battle over the Arian Controversy had been set. On the one hand, Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria was teaching that Jesus Christ was of the very *same* Substance and Essence of God the Father. He said that the Scriptures were clear and that Christ and the Father were *homoousia*- which is the Greek word for “of the same substance”.

On the other hand, Arius, a presbyter in the Church had added one letter to that word and said that God the Son was *homoiousia*- which meant: *a similar- but different substance- than God the Father*. And the net effect of Arius adding one letter to one word was that Christ’s full, biblical Deity was denied. Arius’ heresy taught in effect that while Jesus was certainly more than a man- He was less than God- which of course is an unbiblical position.

Now as we discussed last time, the Emperor of Rome, Constantine had recently converted to Christianity and had issued the Edict of Milan which in effect gave Christianity full legal status within the Empire. And with that single act- Christianity went from being an illegal and persecuted religion to the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Now we have already met three of the six men who were center stage in this real life drama of Church history. We have met Arius- the wicked presbyter of Alexandria, who started the heresy and who gave Arianism its name. We have met Alexander, the godly Bishop of Alexandria who opposed Arius and who held to the Biblical teaching that Christ was fully Divine. And we have also met Constantine, the Roman Emperor, who had converted to Christianity and who was now wanting to get involved in the Church.

And today I want to introduce you to three more people who will help you to comprehend the importance of this struggle that went on- back in the fourth century. I want you to meet Eusebius of Caesarea- the famous Church historian. Now Eusebius was a personal friend of Arius- and while it isn’t fair to classify Eusebius as a full blown Arian- he was at least very *sympathetic* to Arius’ false teaching. And there is the fifth player who was *also* named Eusebius- and we’ll call him, Eusebius of Nicomedia. And *this* Eusebius was in league with Arius all the way and fully agreed that Jesus was not Divine. It was *this*

Eusebius who operated behind the scenes as a leader in the Arian Controversy to help deceive the Church. And to help keep these guys straight, I will call them “Eusebius the historian” and “Eusebius the Arian”.

But now we come to the real hero of the story- a man by the name of Athanasius. And it was Athanasius who became the human instrument by which God used to salvage the Christian Church and rescue it from the heresy of Arianism.

You see, there was a moment during this Controversy when Athanasius was literally the only leader in the entire Christian Church who had not compromised with or fully embraced the heresy of Arianism. And so Athanasius stood alone against every other leader in the visible Church of the fourth century as he forcefully and passionately defended the Biblical account of the Deity of Christ against his own brethren and did not hesitate to call them all to repentance. And history reveals that Athanasius never wavered; he never faltered; and he never compromised on what the Bible plainly and boldly declared about Jesus in **John 1:1**:

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

Now this moment was one of the most significant events in the 2,000 year old history of the Church. And Athanasius did us all proud as he refused to compromise with error even about one single letter of one single word. In fact, there is a Latin phrase that they put on Athanasius’ tombstone that reads, *Athanasius Contra Mundo*, which means, “*Athanasius against the entire world*”. This is the degree to which Athanasius stood his ground.

So, let’s review the Chronology. Arius is ordained as a presbyter in 311; The Emperor Constantine is converted in 312. In 319, Arius accuses his own bishop, Alexander, of teaching Modalism because Alexander declares that God the Father and God the Son are of the very same Essence or the very same Substance.

Arius then goes on a tirade and teaches that God the Father and God the Son are of a *similar* but entirely *different* Essence or Substance- which in effect denies the full Deity of Jesus Christ.

In 321, after trying for years to bring Arius back into the Truth, Alexander convenes a Church Council and excommunicates Arius from the Church for teaching a heresy that denies the Deity of Christ.

About this same time, Constantine was beginning to settle in and enjoy the peace of a united Empire. He had won all of his wars; he had embraced Christianity and he wanted to bring peace and prosperity back to the Roman Empire.

Constantine was amazed that the Bishops and presbyters of the Church that he had embraced were fighting over Doctrine. The dispute between Arius and Alexander was raging and was the topic of conversation in the entire eastern half of the Roman Empire. From Egypt to Palestine, the discussion in the market place centered on the struggle over the Deity of Christ. It was that big of a debate.

So, Constantine became very troubled about this dispute and he did something that was totally unprecedented. This secular Roman Emperor intervened in a theological dispute in the Christian Church. And Constantine wrote a joint letter to both Arius and Alexander which said this in part:

“Give me back my quiet days and carefree nights. Do not let me spend the rest of my days joylessly.”

And here was Constantine’s proposed solution. He said,

“Set aside your differences. Drop this argument over Doctrine.”

In essence, Constantine was telling these men that he believed that external unity was more important than Sound Doctrine. Constantine said that it was more important that the Church *appear* to be in unity than it was that the Church was faithful to Scripture. Constantine was saying that, to him, it was more important that Arius and Alexander liked each other and put forth a show of unity than it was that they taught what was True. Boy that sounds familiar, doesn’t it?

Constantine’s position is *exactly* the prevailing sentiment of the modern Church of our today. Many leaders and lay people alike feel as though there is no point of Doctrine- no matter how critical or crucial it is- that is worth fighting over. That somehow- as long as we get along

on a personal level- then it really doesn't matter what we believe. And this is *exactly* what Constantine was saying.

Constantine was baffled by the division in the Church. And that confusion gives us reason to doubt that Constantine was actually saved. You see, to a truly born again believer- Truth is paramount. What God said and what God means by what He said is of the utmost importance to a person who has been born from above. That is because the driving energy behind those who are saved is Love for God and Love for what God said so that we can be obedient to God and be found faithful.

But to a politician or to a tare or to a wannabe- Truth is just something else we can compromise over and twist to suite our own fancy. In fact to a person who is in the Church but yet who is not saved- Truth is actually looked at as being the problem. And so these people believe that if we would all just cast Truth to the side- we would have unity and we could all hold hands and sway back and forth and sing, "Kumbaya". So the fact that Constantine wanted peace in the Church at the expense of Divine Truth shows us a lot about the condition of his heart.

You see, Constantine really didn't care one whit about whether or not Jesus was God. He couldn't have cared less about what the Bible taught or that Arius was trying to destroy the Church. All Constantine saw was that he had just ended 300 years of persecution against the Church and Christianity had a chance now to flourish and prosper and to become powerful on the earth and here these men were arguing over one letter of one word.

So Eusebius the historian, who was also the Bishop of Caesarea wrote this,

"Who knows how the soul is united with the body and how it leaves it, and yet we venture to inquire into the eternal Essence of the Godhead? Christ said, 'he that believeth on me hath everlasting life'- not he who understands how Christ is begotten of the Father. Were the latter the case, no man could attain unto Salvation."

So we can see that the mood in the fourth century Church was very similar to the mood of the Church today. Many thought back then the way that people think today- that Doctrine divides; that Biblical Truth splits people apart; so rather than all of us humbly bowing our

knees to the Authority of sacred Scripture- we need to *minimize* Doctrine or better yet- eliminate it altogether- because as long as you believe on Jesus- nothing else matters, right?

Many say today that to even attempt to believe or God forbid, actually *proclaim* Sound Biblical Truth- to the exclusion of what is false- is not even Christian because Objective, propositional Truth makes so many people feel bad- and these people reason that anything that makes people uncomfortable- must not be of God. And that is what is called, “compromise” dear friends.

But what people should say is that what God said in Scripture is true and everyone who disagrees with that- is wrong. What we ought to say is that unity in the Church among believers has to be centered around Divine Truth- or unity is nothing but a myth. So the only way to have real and lasting unity, dear friends- is if everyone is willing to believe and teach and accept what God said in Scripture- to the *exclusion* of what people just made up.

But when people twist what God has said or when they eliminate parts of what God said or when they want to change what God said by either adding to it or taking away from it- then those people are wrong and they are sinning and we must call them to repentance.

And if they do repent – then wonderful! We have gained a brother. But if they refuse to repent and they insist on teaching things that are in blatant contradiction to Scripture- then Paul and Peter and James and John and Jesus said that we who lead in the Church have the unpopular duty and the Scriptural obligation to protect the sheep who are following God and to excommunicate those people out of the Church and label them as being what they are- heretics.

Now I realize that this sounds harsh- but it isn't harsh at all. It is being faithful to what the New Testament teaches. What is harsh is people who refuse to teach what the Bible says. That is both harsh and dangerous. Because what happens if others begin to believe the false teaching? What happens to the souls of people who, like sheep, are easily led astray? Who is going to guard the souls of the sheep if the leaders of the Church don't care about Truth?

Well, 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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