

# Be on Guard for Yourselves and For all the Flock

## 6- The Danger of the Heresy of Arianism

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February 14, 2021

### Hebrews 1:1-14

**1** God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

**2** in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

**3** And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

**4** having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

**5** For to which of the angels did He ever say, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"?

**6** And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM."

**7** And of the angels He says, "WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE."

**8** But of the Son He says, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM.

**9** "YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS."

**10** And, "YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;

**11** THEY WILL PERISH, BUT YOU REMAIN; AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD LIKE A GARMENT,

**12** AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP; LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED. BUT YOU ARE THE SAME, AND YOUR YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END."

**13** But to which of the angels has He ever said, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET"?

## **14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?**

To the Glory of God

Now, at some point during the 400 years after the Prophet Malachi uttered his Prophecy and God took on flesh and became Man- the Jewish leadership all-but *abandoned* any effort to be faithful to the inspired Old Testament Scriptures. A deep and dark Cloud had descended on Israel during that time- that was, arguably, the very *worst* period of Jewish History. And many interpreted that four century Silence of Heaven- as a Sign that God was either dead or that He had surely forgotten them.

You see, during the time period between Malachi and Matthew- there was no Prophet; no Voice; no Angel; no Miracle; no Utterance; and no Messiah. First the Greeks and then the Romans had violently invaded Israel; brutally subjugated the Jews; and imposed on them very intense and barbaric insults and terrible Persecution. These pagans mocked the Jewish religion and laughed at the one, true, and living God. Yet God did not rise up to defend His people. It truly seemed as though all was lost.

Periodically, various men rose up- laying claim to be the long-awaited Messiah- and, for a while, they succeeded in acquiring small groups of men- willing to fight and die to evict the “pagans” from the Promised Land. Yet one-by-one- these “Messiah-wanna-bes” all fell by the might and seeming invincibility of the Roman sword.

At some point early in the development of the Church, the respected Pharisee, Gamaliel, rose up to reason with the Sanhedrin Court about their intention to persecute the Apostles. And in his discourse, Gamaliel mentioned two of these “False Messiahs”, who had risen up during the time period between the two Testaments:

### **The Acts 5:34-39**

**34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time.**

**35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men.**

**36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.**

**37 After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered.**

**38 So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown;**

**39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."**

... so, both "Theudas" and "Judas of Galilee" failed in their bid to be the Messiah and return Israel to the Jews<sup>1</sup>. Then in **Matthew 24:5**, Jesus prophesied that *many* other men would rise up- all claiming to be Who He was:

**For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.**

... and truly there have been "many"<sup>i</sup>. So, *somebody* is always trying to masquerade as Jesus. And this is something that we have to deal with- even in our day.

But what the Jews did, in between the two Testament periods, was to begin to *elevate* Angels to the status of being like "demi-gods". So, for example, to many Jews, there were Angels, who caused it to rain; and Angels, who gave them children; and Angels, who brought them prosperity, etc. And by the time of Jesus's earthly Ministry- this Idolatry concerning Angels had become so widespread that the "religion of the Jews" of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century bore little resemblance to what the Old Testament Scriptures actually taught.

Now this paganism by the Jews was *especially* horrific, because God had already told them NOT to do this (**Exodus 20:3**) and the Jewish people knew full-well that every time they descended into paganism- God judged them.

But God was faithful to raise up the unknown writer of the **Book of Hebrews**, who dealt with this problem in, or around AD 68- in great detail. And beginning with verse 4 of Chapter 1, the writer of **Hebrews** brought out Old Testament Passages and taught that not only are believers NOT supposed to worship Angels- or even pray to them- but that all the Angels of God- worship Jesus.

**4 having become as much better than the angels, as He [Jesus] has inherited a more excellent name than they.**

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<sup>1</sup> Defeating the pagans- *militarily*- was the primary Goal of the many "false Messiahs" (false Christs) that rose up during the 400 year "inter-testament" stage of Israel's History. That was NOT Jesus' Goal. He came to save God's people from their Sins- NOT from the pagans.

**5 For to which of the angels did He ever say, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"?**

**6 And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM." (Clarification added)**

So, here the writer of **Hebrews** quotes from **Psalm 2:7; 2Samuel 7:14; Psalm 89:26&27**; the Greek version of **Deuteronomy 32:43**; and **Psalm 97:7** to make the point that, from the very beginning, Jesus has always been *infinitely* superior to the Angels; and that, from the beginning of time- all the Angels actually *worship* Jesus. Why did he do this? Because he also infallibly taught that Jesus is God.

### **Hebrews 1:2&3**

**in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He [Jesus] is the radiance of His [God the Father's] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Clarification added)**

Now look again at the seven "Excellencies" that the writer of **Hebrews** says that Jesus has:

1. Jesus is appointed Heir of all things
2. God made the world through Jesus
3. Jesus is the "Radiance of God's Glory"
4. Jesus is the "exact Representation of God's Nature"
5. Jesus upholds all things by the Word of His Power
6. Jesus ALONE made Purification of Sins
7. Jesus "sat down" at the Right Hand of the Majesty on High

... and these "Excellencies" are not found in anyone else in all the Universe- except Jesus. ONLY JESUS!

But now I want to zero in on just two of these Excellencies:

1. Jesus is the Radiance of God the Father's *Glory*
2. Jesus is the Exact Representation of God the Father's *Nature*

... so, the writer of **Hebrews** says that Jesus is two things:

1. The Radiance
2. The Exact Representation

... and Jesus is those two things- of two Attributes of God the Father:

1. God the Father's *Glory*
2. God the Father's *Nature*

... and that would make the "Nature"; or the "Substance"; or the "Essence" of Jesus to be IDENTICAL to that of God the Father (and God the Holy Spirit), which, in effect, makes Jesus to BE GOD!

So, while Jesus is a completely distinct "Person" from God the Father (with a completely *distinct* Personality and Role in Redemption)- He is of the very SAME "Essence"; "Substance"; or "Nature" of God the Father. How do we know that? Because there is only ONE God.

#### **Deuteronomy 6:4**

**"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!"**

But in what *way* is God, "One"? He is "One" in His "Essence"; His "Substance"; or His "Nature". And this is why the Summary Statement of the Trinity is so important:

**God is "one" in His ESSENCE; and is *eternally* manifested in three distinct "Persons" of God the Father; God the Son; and God the Holy Spirit**

... so, while God the Father; God the Son; and God the Holy Spirit are entirely *unique* and *distinct* in their "Personhood"- they all share the one single Essence, Substance; or Nature of the one God- which is what makes all three Persons to be fully Deity. And it is the word, "Essence/Substance/Nature" in this "Summary Statement" that is at stake with the Heresy of Arianism.

Now there are several men, that are important to know in this real-life Drama- so let me introduce you to them:

- Arius- the Heretic
- Alexander- the Bishop
- Athanasius- the Hero
- Constantine I- the Roman Emperor
- Eusebius of Caesarea- the Church Historian

- Eusebius of Nicomedia- a Presbyter deceived by Arius

So, around the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century- Constantine I, the Emperor of Rome made a startling Confession. He said that God had shown him a heavenly Sign and as a result- he had converted to Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

Now this was an amazing Statement by the most powerful man in the “known world”. Since the first Prayer Meeting in the Upper Room, Christianity had existed as an “illegal” and “persecuted” religion. Hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of believers had been martyred for their Faith in Jesus during the first 300 years of the Church’s existence. Truly the expanse of Christianity around the world had been bathed in the blood of the martyrs. But now that the Emperor had converted- *everything* would change.

And as a result of his supposed conversion- in AD 312- Constantine issued the “Edict of Milan”- which allowed Christianity to function within the Roman Empire- without any “official” Persecution by the State.<sup>3</sup> It even returned monies and land that the Roman Empire had confiscated from Christians and the Church. Believers, who had been imprisoned for their Faith in Jesus were released and businesses were ordered to NOT discriminate against believers when hiring employees.

Now it is important to understand that Constantine did NOT begin to control the Christian Church at this time- nor did he *command* that believers *must* worship on Sunday. The Christian Church took the first day of the week (Sunday), renamed it as the “Lord’s Day” (**The Revelation 1:10**), and began to gather together from the very beginning of the Church (**The Acts 20:7; 1Corinthians 16:2**)- to *celebrate* the Resurrection of Jesus; gather together; and preach the Gospel.

The myth that Constantine *forced* the Church to *abandon* the Jewish Sabbath (sundown Friday to sundown Saturday) and worship on Sunday- was started back then by the unbelieving Jews and is taught to this day by the Seventh Day Adventist Cult and some “Messianic” cult groups. But what DID happen- was that the Church began to enjoy a life *without* the wholesale shedding of human blood that they had endured for over three Centuries.

And the result was that Christians began to find Prosperity and Peace like they had never known. And while the Edict of Milan did NOT order all Roman subjects to convert to Christianity- many took this Edict as a way to find favor with the Emperor if they did. And so, the membership rolls of the Churches throughout

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<sup>2</sup> Flavius Valerius Constantinius (AD 272-337) Although he lived much of his life as a pagan, and later as a catechumen, he began to favor Christianity beginning in AD 312, after he said he saw a Sign from heaven that if his soldiers put the “Chi Rho” symbol on their shields- they would win the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. They did win that battle. Constantine was finally baptized by Eusebius of Nicomedia an Arian bishop, just before his death.

<sup>3</sup> After the Edict of Milan, the official position of the Roman Government was that local and personal Persecution of Christians by individuals was none of their business. And so, that type of Persecution persisted.

the Roman Empire began to swell. And those employed by the Government and those who did business with the Government suddenly “felt led” to convert. So, there was a sudden rise in “false Conversions” and “nominal Christianity”<sup>4</sup> was born.

The result was that people thought that many biblical Prophecies were being fulfilled and that the Kingdom of God had finally come. Many believed and actually taught that Constantine’s supposed conversion was the “Second Coming” of Christ to this earth. And this amazing new-found Freedom and Safety and Prosperity brought about one of the *worst* things that has ever happened to the Church of Jesus in its over 2,000- year history- the birth of “Christendom”.

“Christendom” is the ungodly and unbiblical “blending” of the Church with the State. It is the unholy “marriage” between the “City of God” and the “City of Man”<sup>5</sup>. Christendom allows for “nominal Christianity” to flourish; and it makes supposed Conversions by important, powerful, or wealthy people accepted- almost without hesitation- *regardless* of how these people live their lives. Christendom *rejects* Holiness; *muffles* the Cry of the Church against ungodliness; and puts political leaders at the forefront of Church Business. It is a blight that we must guard against in our day.

Listen, it is fine to want our political leaders to be Christians or at least be *favorable* to the Church. But to think that this Nation will experience genuine Revival simply because a certain person is in Office- flies in the face of everything we say we believe.

Revival starts primarily with men- hungering and thirsting for Righteousness. And then those hungry men begin to love and lead their wives and children. And then those godly, hungry, thirsty Families begin to transform the Church. And then those biblical Churches begin to transform the Culture of their Communities. And then, out from those transformed Communities rise godly leaders- who begin to lead with godly integrity and biblical Principles. And that hungering and that thirsting spreads outward- like concentric circles on the water- eventually transforming the Nation.

So, this is a “bottom up” approach to transforming the Nation and NOT a “top-down” approach. And while this approach is much harder and takes much more time- than simply voting for the “right man”- it *will* work; and it *has* worked- throughout history- because it is what the Bible teaches. The Christian Church in America is now and MUST always remain- completely *distinct* and separate from

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<sup>4</sup> Nominal Christianity is being a Christian in name only- without truly being born again.

<sup>5</sup> The terms, “City of God” and “City of Man” was coined by Augustine in his book, “*De civitate Dei*” (AD 413-426), that became the Foundation of Western Civilization

the State. And that way- we will NEVER be compromised to the point where we can't call our leaders to account before God.

Now right in the middle of this amazing Freedom and Peace and Prosperity- a man named, "Arius" rose to prominence. Arius was in the Ministry at the Church in Alexandria, Egypt and served under a Bishop named, Alexander. And one day- Arius heard Alexander preaching about the Danger of the Heresy of Modalism<sup>6</sup> and upholding the Truth about the Doctrine of the Trinity- and Arius became outraged. And he soon filed a formal complaint that accused Alexander of Heresy.

Arius charged that, in effect, Alexander's Teaching was making Jesus to be completely "equal" with God the Father in His "Essence"- thus *lowering* God the Father's Status- which was blasphemy. Alexander denied the charge and said that there is no way that the Trinity can be true unless Jesus absolutely IS equal with God the Father in His "Essence".

The Controversy centered on the "Nature" or the "Essence" or the "Substance" of both God the Father and God the Son. Was Jesus of the very SAME Substance, Essence, or Nature of the God the Father- or was He of a SIMILAR but completely DIFFERENT Substance, Essence, or Nature?

Now that may not sound like a big deal with some of you. But the End Result is that, if Jesus is of the SAME Substance of God the Father- then Jesus *is* God. He is fully Deity. But, if Jesus is of a SIMILAR- but *different* Substance from that of God the Father- then two things are also true:

1. Jesus CANNOT be God
2. Jesus is a created Being

... which is exactly what the Bible teaches. So, nothing short of the integrity of the Bible and the full Deity of Jesus was at stake here.

Now many of you have heard the phrase, "*There is not on iota difference between them*", when discussing two similar things. Well, that phrase was created in the Fire of this Controversy. The Issue that Arius raised- concerned a single Greek word, "*homoousios*" that the Christian Church had been using, since the very beginning, to describe the Nature of Christ. And this word comprises two other Greek words, "*Homo*"- meaning: "*Same*" and "*Ousia*"- meaning: "*Substance*"; "*Nature*"; or "*Essence*". So, to say that Jesus is, "*homoousios*" with God the Father meant that Jesus is of the very SAME Substance/Essence/Nature with God- which also means that Jesus is God.

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<sup>6</sup> Modalism is a Heresy that denies the Trinity by rejecting the "eternal tri-unity of the Godhead". Modalism teaches that God was ONLY "Father" in the Old Testament; ONLY "Son" in the New Testament; and is now ONLY "Spirit" during the Church Age.



Arius challenged that. And so, he changed one letter of that one word. Arius added the Greek letter, “I” (which in the Greek language is the “Iota”). So, Arius changed the word to read that Jesus is “*homoiousios*” with God- meaning that Jesus is of a SIMILAR, but completely DIFFERENT Nature; Substance; or Essence than that of God the Father. And this small change had the effect to make Jesus to NOT be fully God. But it also made Jesus to be a created Being. So, to Arius, Jesus was certainly *higher* than Man- but He was *lower* than God the Father. So, that made Jesus to be nothing more than a “demi-god” or an Angel.

Now I pray that most of you can see exactly what is wrong with this. If Jesus is NOT God- then many, many verses and passages of the Bible are just flat out wrong. And that means that the entire collection of 66 Books of the sacred Scriptures is completely unreliable. But, even more importantly, if Jesus is NOT God- then we are committing idolatry if we worship Him. So, theologically, functionally, and even spiritually- this is a HUGE Issue that simply can’t go unanswered.

But here was the problem. The Church was now enjoying *unprecedented* Peace, Prosperity, and Freedom. The people were happy; Christianity was no longer illegal and believers from one side of the Empire to the other were safe and secure. Some were suggesting that the Kingdom of God had come. Surely this is what the Prophets meant in their Prophecies. So, the average believer- even the average Church Leader was in no mood to engage in a theological struggle at that time. And to argue and debate about one letter of one word- just seemed silly and absurd to most of the people of that day.

*“Who cares if Jesus is of the same Substance with God? We don’t need to quibble about things that don’t affect our daily life. This doesn’t affect Salvation or our eternal Rewards. This is all about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin and it only interests intellectuals, academics, and theologians.”*

And this reluctance to get involved in this Dispute was *complicated* by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Leaders of the visible Church at that time- *already agreed with Arius!* In fact, the Church Historian, Eusebius wrote, that at the time the “Arian Controversy” came to a head- a full 95% of all the Church Leaders around the entire “known world”- from Great Britain to India- had already capitulated on this Issue; they had already compromised with what the Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches; and they had already agreed to believe and teach that Jesus was NOT fully God! And, to add Insult to Injury, these unsaved “hirelings” and “Judas goats” further agreed that it really didn’t matter what people believed about this! Many Church Leaders back then suggested that the Church should simply leave it up to the individual to decide what kind of Nature Jesus did or did not have.

Now to further complicate the Issue- just about the time this Issue was to be discussed seriously- Alexander, the godly, respected Bishop of Alexandria, who had trained and mentored Arius; and who Arius had accused of Heresy for defending the Doctrine of the Trinity- died. And the next guy that was to take Alexander's place was a nobody- a lowly, unimpressive, unimportant presbyter, named "Athanasius".

You see, the Battle against the Heresy of Modalism had ignited a fire that began to rage within the Church. And more and more Church Leaders found it ridiculous to try to maintain the Doctrine of the Trinity. Many Leaders complained that it was simply too difficult to try to teach uneducated and mostly illiterate people about a God, Who...

**... is one in His Essence (Substance) and yet eternally manifested in three distinct Persons of God the Father; God the Son; and God the Holy Spirit.**

... and- besides- Who cares? Why argue and debate and fight now- at the very moment when God has obviously moved- mightily- and is now blessing His Church with wondrous Peace and Prosperity? Why not use the time and resources it would take to settle this Issue (that nobody cares about anyway) to reach the pagan peoples at the far reaches of the world? Just think about how many people we could touch with the Gospel; and what a glorious public Testimony of Love and Harmony we could have- if we just *overlook* this one little squabble about Jesus' Nature- and join hands together in Unity?

This illustrates the Reality that fighting against false Teaching and upholding biblical Truth has *never* been easy. It has *never* been popular; and it has *always* been controversial. One of the loudest cries *against* "scriptural Orthodoxy" back then- is the very *same* cry that we hear today: "*Doctrine divides!*" And so, in the name of "Unity"- we must *abandon* Doctrine.

Well, first of all, the word, "Doctrine" when used correctly, has to do with "Biblical Truth". And to say that "Biblical Truth" (Doctrine) divides is a true Statement. Biblical Truth DOES divide. It divides and separates between those who are saved and those who aren't. It divides between the fish on the right side with the fish on the left. It separates between the sheep and the goats; between the children of God and the children of the devil. It divides between the wheat and the tares; between those who have genuinely experienced the miracle of the New Birth and those who haven't. And it makes a distinction between those who love God and those who don't. And that tells us that Biblical Truth is infinitely MORE important than Unity.

Now please read with me a very important Passage from **1Corinthians 1: 24- 28** that will give us insight in *why* God raised up a man like Athanasius to rescue the Christian Church from the Darkness of the Heresy of Arius:

**... but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,**

So, *why* did God go to such great lengths to choose unimportant and unimpressive people like Athanasius? The very next verse tells us:

**so that no man may boast before God.**

Now History tells us that Arius, the Heretic was tall, dark, and handsome. Arius was an amazing orator- who held people spell bound with his ability to quote, from memory large sections of Scripture. On the other-hand, Athanasius was “Tennessee ugly”. He was *not* dynamic; he *didn't* command respect; Athanasius spoke so softly that people could hardly hear him; and he wasn't eloquent- at all. So, out of all the people on earth at that time- God Almighty chose *this* guy to defend the Truth against a man like Arius and rescue the Christian Church? Really? Yes, He did! And thank God, He did- because God could not have chosen anyone better.

God truly raised up Athanasius and God put within this man a spirit that simply would NOT back down.<sup>7</sup> And so, this lowly man went to work to defend the Truth and defeat an Evil Heresy. And to do that- Athanasius had to literally stand by himself- against a well-loved and respected Heretic; a lazy, ungodly, and apathetic Leadership; and even the Emperor himself. But Athanasius was willing to burn it all down- rather than allow the Church of Jesus to become polluted with False Teaching.

And this illustrates something that we need to take to heart in our day. All total, the length of time that the Church wrestled with this Issue was 42 years. Let me repeat that. 1700 years ago, the Christian Church wrestled and fought over one letter of one word- for 42 years! I don't think the modern Church would wrestle

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<sup>7</sup> Today, theologians and biblical scholars refer to Athanasius as the “Father of Orthodoxy”

with this Issue for 42 minutes. I don't think that many of the Leaders of the visible Church on the earth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century would be any different than the Leaders of the Church back in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. They would, almost to a man, say, "*What's the big deal? Who cares if Jesus is God or not? Nobody needs to worry about this. We should simply allow each individual believer to decide for himself if Jesus has the same Nature as that of God the Father.*"

And this stems from a *misunderstanding* and a *misappropriation* of what "Christian Unity" really is. Now the Bible *commands* that believers walk in "Unity". But "Unity" is NOT "Uniformity". And Unity is also something that can only come by agreeing in what we believe and what we teach.

Now, over the years, I have been *intimately* involved in different Efforts on this Coast- to help bring about Unity among professing believers. And we would gather together once a week- to pray and to sing and try to unite each other together- in love. And we would pray about Unity; and we would sing about Unity; and we would join hands; and sway back and forth; and we would have joint Services together- it was really something.

But, eventually, every Effort would fail. Every single Effort at uniting believers together- would fail. And all these Efforts would disintegrate into nothing. Why? Because true Unity CANNOT be achieved by singing songs. Unity is NOT achieved by simply praying for it- either. To have real Unity and not the *semblance* of Unity- to have Substance and not Symbolism- to have Reality and not merely a Myth- we must have something Important; something Large; something higher and better than ourselves- over which we may all unite.

And the first thing people will say is, "*Sure- we must all unite about Jesus.*" And I agree. But what is it about Jesus- that we all must unite over? Two things. And these are the very *same* two things that began the Church in the first place:

1. Who Jesus is
2. What Jesus has done

... and if we all agree with Who Jesus is and What Jesus has done- then we may have true Unity. But if we don't agree with Who Jesus is; or if we don't agree with all that Jesus has done- then we will NOT have Unity- no matter how hard we pray; and no matter how many songs we sing. So, it isn't the surface and shallow things that unites us. We have to agree with the deep and the hard and the profound things. So, not Songs- but Doctrine. Not Prayer- but Doctrine. Now, don't misunderstand me- we DO need to pray that all believers will have all things common. And we should all be ashamed and grieve over the fact that all believers today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century- are NOT in Unity. But the ONLY way to achieve true, biblical Unity- is by agreeing with those two Issues.

But there is another huge misunderstanding about Unity that we must all be aware of. Since it is true that we must unite over what we believe and what we teach- then what we believe and teach takes precedent over the Unity that we seek for. In other words, Unity will *automatically* flow out from us all agreeing with what we believe and teach. So, the focus must *never* be about Unity- but about what we believe and teach.

Now why is that important? Because if we focus on the Unity rather than Doctrine- we will compromise Doctrine for the sake of Unity. If Unity is the Goal and biblical Truth stands in the way of achieving that Unity- the odds are very high that we will either *minimize* or *ignore* biblical Truth- so we may have Unity. But what *should* happen is that anyone at odds with biblical Truth should repent and conform to the Truth- and then Unity will automatically be achieved.

So, while personal relationships are vital in Christianity- they take second place to Truth. Now, sadly, not all divisions among believers involve Truth. Some divisions involve personal opinions and individual *applications* of the Truth. And that is NOT the same thing. So, we must all work real hard to make sure that we are not allowing our opinions or our own application of the Truth- to divide us. That would be wrong. But to divide over maintaining the Truth- is NOT only correct- it is godly.

1700 years ago, the Christian Church was in danger of dividing into two groups- NOT because of petty squabbles or personal opinions or individual application of the Truth. No, the Church was splitting in two- because of a very serious and important Doctrine about the Nature of Jesus. And that is why this Issue had to be solved.

Now, eventually, this Controversy reached into the palace of the Emperor himself. And when Constantine heard about the Issue- and the fact that Athanasius was willing to go to the mat- over a single letter of a single word- he was terribly perplexed. I mean, “*After all I have done to favor the Church- they are now in danger of dividing into two different groups? Over one letter of one word? Seriously? I mean, who is this Athanasius and what does he think he is doing?*”

So, right from the beginning- Athanasius was portrayed as the “trouble-maker”. Athanasius was standing in the way of Christian Unity- so, naturally, he simply couldn’t be correct. And the fact that Athanasius was defending the Deity of Jesus from the Scriptures alone (Sola Scriptura) didn’t matter.

God had moved to give the Church great Peace and Prosperity and the Leaders of the Church simply had no patience with anyone standing in the way of what God was doing. And so, the very first thing that the Emperor did- was to *command* Athanasius to “Stand Down!” And Athanasius humbly but firmly responded that the Emperor was unqualified to get involved in this Issue and that, by God’s Grace, he would NEVER stand down.

Well, it is rare that anyone speaks to the Roman Emperor like that. And so, it wasn't long until Athanasius found himself banished from the Empire. But before he left- Athanasius made a comment about the Arian Controversy. He stood before the Leaders of his local Church and quoted **John 1:1-4, 10-14**:

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

**2 He was in the beginning with God.**

**3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.**

**4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.**

**10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.**

**11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.**

**12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,**

**13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**

**14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

... and Athanasius said that there was simply no way that anyone could read this Passage, honestly, and not come away that Jesus is fully God. And they all just looked at him as he went away.

Fifteen months later, Athanasius came back. And the first thing they asked him was if he had learned to stop defending the full Deity of Jesus; and was he ready now to agree with Arius. And the first thing out of Athanasius's mouth was, **John 1:1-4, 10-14**. And this happened over and over and over again. Five separate times Athanasius was banished from the Empire for being a "trouble-maker" and five times- he came back and quoted from the Apostle John.

The Emperor was apoplectic. Was Athanasius really willing to destroy the Church of Jesus over an Issue that nobody cared about? He must be crazy. Constantine was quoted by Eusebius, the historian as saying,

"Give me back my quiet days and carefree nights. Do not let me spend the rest of my days joylessly. Set aside your differences. Drop this argument over Doctrine."

... but even Eusebius, who was also the Bishop of Caesarea got into the Controversy and 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.”

... but his Statement completely misses the point. Athanasius was never expecting lost people to understand all of this. That was never his intent. The Issue is what should the Christian Church teach and believe and what should people, who are already saved- believe?

But a *secondary* Issue in this Controversy was whether the Bible was fully inspired. Because even Arius never questioned what the Scriptures actually said about Christ’s Nature. His contention was, like all Heretics, that what God showed him- was a “higher Revelation” than the Bible. So, like all Cults today, Arius was perfectly willing to have the Scriptures *re-written* to coincide with his supposed Revelation!

Now you would think that someone so brazen about re-writing the Bible- would never have any credibility with the majority of the Leaders of the Church. But the supposed Conversion of the Emperor and the unprecedented Peace and Prosperity that the Church was enjoying- compromised these men and made them unwilling to defend the Truth.

Finally, Constantine had had enough. And so, even though he had no Authority to do so- Constantine called for a Church Council to decide the matter. And the Church assembled the Council in the city of Nicaea<sup>8</sup> in May of AD 325. Interestingly, a man was present at this Council that we would all come to know. *Nicholas of Myra*, who was a Bishop in the south-west region of modern-day Turkey. And, even though most of us know little or nothing about what this man taught or believed during his life- most of the world would later embrace him as he “became” the famous “St. Nicholas” or Santa Claus.<sup>9</sup>

After much debate, biblical Orthodoxy was preserved; and Athanasius stood tall as the man God used to rescue the Church from the darkness of this Heresy. So, the Council of Nicaea was successful in officially and formally declaring Arianism to be a damnable Heresy; and Arius himself was excommunicated and banished to Illyricum (modern Serbia)- after repeated attempts at begging him to repent and recant.

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<sup>8</sup> Ancient Nicaea is the present- day city of Iznik in Turkey.

<sup>9</sup> Nicholas was NOT deceived by the Arian Heresy. There is a legend that says, during the Council debate- Nicholas rose and slapped an Arian or maybe even Arius himself.

Now in order to preserve this Victory and to ensure that future generations would understand and agree with the biblical Truth about the Nature of Jesus- a “Summary Statement” was issued at the completion of the Council. This Summary Statement became known as the “Nicene Creed” and the section about the Nature of Christ reads as follows:

And [I believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God,  
Begotten of his Father before all Worlds,  
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:  
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,  
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.  
He 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.  
And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead:  
Whose kingdom shall have no end.

Now the phrase, “being of one substance with the Father” comes from that Greek word, “*homoousios*” that Athanasius fought so hard to preserve.

Now you would think that this would have been the end of the Arian Controversy. But as I told you earlier- you can’t kill a Heresy. Heresies are Beliefs and Teachings and they can’t die. They simply go somewhere else to deceive somebody else.

Sadly, after the Council of Nicaea issued the Nicene Creed- Arianism spread to more and more people- until almost the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, where there were *more* people deceived by this Heresy than there was during the life of Arius- who died in AD 336. Finally, in AD 381- the Church had to convene *another* Council (the Council of Constantinople) to make the Creed even stronger against Arianism.

Now Athanasius died in AD 373 and on his tombstone<sup>10</sup> is an inscription that says, “*Athanasius contra mundum*” which is a Latin phrase designed to honor his faithfulness to the Word of God and reads in English, “*Athanasius against the World*”.

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<sup>10</sup> Athanasius was originally buried in Alexandria, Egypt. During the Crusades- his tomb was moved to Rome. In 1973, his body was returned to Egypt.



At the Council of Constantinople- the visible Church produced yet another Creed- the “*Athanasian Creed*”, which is a much longer and much more strict articulation of what a lost person MUST believe in order to be saved (Essential Truth). Now Athanasius certainly didn’t write this Creed- but he greatly influenced it.

So, what became of the Heresy of Arius? Well, there were always a few regions in Europe where the Heresy had a strong following- but after the Council of Constantinople- Arianism fell greatly out of favor and was barely heard from for over 1400 years.

But at some point in the mid- 1800’s, a former Baptist preacher, by the name of Charles Taze Russell, stumbled across the Teachings of Arius. And Russell was, at first, himself deceived by this ancient Doctrine of Devils- but then he made it his life’s mission to propagate the Heresy of Arius all over again.

At first, Russell called his efforts, the “*Bible Study Movement*” from Pittsburgh. In 1879, he began to publish a monthly magazine called, “*Zion’s Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence*”. In 1881, Russell bought a small printing company in New York City and renamed his group, “*Zion’s Watch Tower Tract Society*”; which was later changed to be “*The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society*” which, today is the publishing arm of the Cult called, “Jehovah’s Witnesses”. This Cult now has a world-wide membership of 8.7 million souls, comprising 120,000 separate congregations, in 240 regions of the world!<sup>11</sup>

The Cult of Jehovah’s Witnesses have even developed their *own* Bible- the “*New World Translation*”, which changed the main Passage that Athanasius used at the Council of Nicaea- **John 1:1**. In their version this verse reads:

In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was “a” God

... which *denies* the full Deity of Jesus. Adding the article “*a*” shows an *amazing* lack of linguistic intelligence and simply *cannot* be defended on any level. It’s ONLY purpose is to deceive. But this change is perfectly in line with what Arius himself taught: That if the Bible is at odds with his supposed revelation- then, by all means, just change the Bible!

It is heartbreaking to know that there are 8.7 million people who are being deceived by an ancient Teaching- that was officially and formally condemned as a Heresy- 1700 years ago! This underscores how important it is to teach biblical Truth to every generation of believers.

Today, the Foundational Doctrine of the Jehovah’s Witnesses is simply an *expanded* version of Arius’ ancient attack against the Nature of Jesus:

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jehovah's\\_Witnesses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jehovah's_Witnesses)

- That the Trinity is a false, Man-made Teaching
- That Jesus is NOT God- but a created being
- That Jesus was the arch-angel “*Michael*” in the Old Testament

... all blasphemous lies about the Nature of Jesus.

Every year here on the Coast- thousands of full-color brochures are distributed- inviting people to come to the Coliseum to hear Teaching about the “End-Times”. What people don’t realize- is that this is a cleverly disguised attempt at evangelizing people to join the Cult of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Except that God was faithful to raise up and obscure man named, “Athanasius”; and put within him a spirit that simply refused to back away from Biblical Truth- every single one of us would be Jehovah’s Witnesses today. So, we must be humble and thank God- that He used a “weak”; “foolish”; “unwise”; “ignoble”; and “base” man like Athanasius. And we should praise God that Jesus was good for His Word, when He promised,

**... I will build My Church, and the Gates of Hades will not overpower it.**

Amen. Let’s pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

<sup>i</sup> Among the most *infamous* of these “False Messiahs” or “False Christs” are:

- **Dositheos the Samaritan** (mid 1st century), was one of the supposed founders of *Mandaeanism*. After the time of Jesus, he tried to persuade the Samaritans that he himself was the Messiah, who was prophesied by Moses.
- **Ann Lee** (1736–1784), a central figure to the *Shakers*, who thought she "embodied all the perfections of God" in female form and considered herself to be Christ's female counterpart in 1772.
- **John Nichols Thom** (1799–1838), who had achieved fame and followers as Sir William Courtenay and adopted the claim of Messiah after a period in a mental institute.
- **Mirza Husayn 'Ali Nuri, Bahá'u'lláh** (1817–1892), born Shiite, adopting Bábism in 1844. In 1863, he claimed to be the “Promised One of all religions” and founded the Bahá'í Faith.
- **Abd-ru-shin** (18 April 1875 – 6 December 1941), founder of the Grail Movement.
- **Lou de Palingboer** (Louwrens Voorthuijzen) (1898-1968), a Dutch charismatic leader who claimed to be God as well as the Messiah from 1950 until his death in 1968.
- **Father Divine** (George Baker) (c. 1880 –1965), an African American spiritual leader from about 1907 until his death, who claimed to be God.
- **André Matsoua** (1899–1942), Congolese founder of *Amicale*, proponents of which subsequently adopted him as Messiah in the late 1920s.
- **Lafayette Ronald Hubbard** (1911-1986) an American author of science fiction and fantasy stories who founded the *Church of Scientology*. Hubbard claimed to be the coming of a foretold Buddhist messiah, the “Maitreya”, who would bring about world peace and enlightenment.
- **Samael Aun Weor** (1917–1977), born Víctor Manuel Gómez Rodríguez, Colombian citizen and later Mexican, was an author, lecturer and founder of the “*Universal Christian Gnostic Movement*”.
- **Ahn Sahng-hong** (1918–1985), founder of the *World Mission Society Church of God* who was worshiped by the members as the Messiah.
- **Sun Myung Moon** (1920–2012), founder and leader of the *Unification Church* established in Seoul, South Korea, who considered himself the Second Coming of Christ.
- **Yahweh ben Yahweh** (1935–2007), born as Hulon Mitchell, Jr., a black nationalist and separatist who created the *Nation of Yahweh*.
- **Laszlo Toth** (1940–2012) claimed he was Jesus Christ as he tried to destroy Michelangelo's Pieta with a geologist hammer.
- **Wayne Bent** (born 1941), also known as Michael Travesser of the *Lord Our Righteousness Church*.
- **Iesu Matayoshi** (1944-2018), in 1997 he established the *World Economic Community Party* based on his conviction that he was God and the Christ.
- **Jung Myung Seok** (born 1945), a South Korean who founded the group now known as *Providence Church* in 1980. He also considers himself to be the Second Coming of Christ. He has said that he has come to finish the incomplete message and mission of Jesus Christ, asserting that he is the Messiah and has the responsibility to save all mankind. He claims that the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection is false but that people can be saved through him.
- **Claude Vorilhon** now known as Raël "*messenger of the Elohim*" (born 1946), a French professional test driver and former car journalist became founder and leader of UFO religion the Raël Movement in 1972, which teaches that life on Earth was scientifically created by a species of extraterrestrials, which they call, *Elohim*. He claimed he met an extraterrestrial humanoid in 1973 and became the Messiah. Then devoted himself to the task he said was given by his "biological father", an extraterrestrial named, *Yahweh*.
- **José Luis de Jesús** (1946–2013), founder and leader of *Creciendo en Gracia* sect (Growing in Grace International Ministry, Inc.), based in Miami, Florida. He claimed to be both Jesus Christ returned and the Antichrist, and exhibited a "666" tattoo on his forearm. He has referred to himself as “*Jesu-Cristo Hombre*”, which translates to "Jesus Christ made Man".
- **Inri Cristo** (born 1948) of Indaial, Brazil, who claims to be the “*Second Jesus*”.
- **Apollo Quiboloy** (born 1950), founder and leader of the *Kingdom of Jesus Christ* religious group, who claims that Jesus Christ is the "Almighty Father," that Quiboloy is "*His Appointed Son*," and that salvation is now completed. Proclaims himself as the "*Appointed Son of the God*" and as the "*Begotten Son of the God*".
- **Brian David Mitchell** (born 1953) Mitchell says he is the “*fore-ordained Angel*” born on earth to be the “*Davidic Servant*” prepared by God as a type of Messiah, who would restore the divinely led “*Kingdom of Israel*” to the world in preparation for Christ's second coming.
- **David Koresh** (Vernon Wayne Howell) (1959–1993), leader of the *Branch Davidians*, renaming himself in honor of King David and Cyrus the Great. He and his followers were killed after a botched ATF raid and siege which ended with their compound catching fire when the FBI pumped CS gas into the building.
- **Maria Devi Christos** (born 1960), leader of the “*Great White Brotherhood*” popular in the former Soviet Union.
- **Sergey Torop** (born 1961), who started to call himself "Vissarion", founder of the *Church of the Last Testament* and the spiritual community *Ecopolis Tiberkul* in Southern Siberia.

- **Alan John Miller** (born 1962), founder of *Divine Truth*, a new religious movement based in Australia. Alan John Miller, also known as A.J., who claims to be Jesus of Nazareth through reincarnation. Miller was formerly an elder in the Jehovah's Witnesses.