

# Athanasius, the Chief Defender of the Trinity in the Early Centuries

By Larry Wessels

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Deuteronomy 7:1-6; 1 John 5:21  
**Preached on:** Wednesday, March 10, 2021

## Christian Answers of Austin, Texas

9009 Martha's Drive  
Austin, TX 78717

**Website:** [www.biblequery.org](http://www.biblequery.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/christiananswers](http://www.sermonaudio.com/christiananswers)

If you like our YouTube channel, please subscribe by clicking on the subscribe button and then by also clicking the bell above to get an automatic update whenever we produce another YouTube video for our CAnswersTV channel. Please share our videos with your friends and relatives. May God bless you. Only one life will soon be past, only what is done for Christ will last.

Christian Answers  
of Austin, Texas

presents

Athanasius  
A Historical Review of the Chief Defender of the Trinity  
In the Early Centuries of the Church

with guest  
Steve Morrison, Director of Research – Christian Answers

with host  
Larry Wessels, Director – Christian Answers

Larry Wessels. Greetings and welcome once again to our program. I'm Larry Wessels, your host, and I want to thank you for being with us today. This is Christian Answers Presents. We've now been doing this program since we first began as a cable access outreach in Austin, Texas back in 1985. So we've been doing the telecast for a long time and each telecast has been on some different subject and how we relate biblical topics or biblical issues to what the Scripture says to those topics and issues.

So today we're going to talk about an important character in Christian church history, Athanasius and, of course, to help us with this is our webmaster for our website [www.historycart.com](http://www.historycart.com) which is ancient church history. Many people are totally ignorant of that subject and I think it's a subject that needs to be known in this day and age

because false prophets love to use early church history as the way to prop up their own false religions. Those at home may not know that my special guest for this broadcast is our Director of Research for Christian Answers, Steve Morrison. There he is right there on the screen. I was forced to give away his situation when he brought that up about the misuse of early church history, but false prophets like to use anything they can to pervert the obvious biblical truth that's there either if they're perverting the word of God itself or early church history, and Steve has done a great job in creating this website [www.historycart.com](http://www.historycart.com) and helping people just out there that just need a little direction and a way to study it for themselves to keep from being deceived by all these religions that misuse it on a regular basis.

With that, Steven, as I already introduced our subject today is Athanasius and church history. Now obviously people don't, most people that are watching this right now don't have a clue who he is or much less a lot about early church history. Before you begin on that, could you just reiterate one more time a little bit about your website historycart.com and then move right into the subject at hand which would be Athanasius. Thank you.

Steve Morrison. Well, historycart.com just has a lot of summaries of writings of early Christian writers. It also has other writers, historical stuff, also stuff about early Muslim writers who are what Islam really taught and really teaches. You can just kind of search through that and see that's kind of a lot of it was taken from other websites, biblequery.org and muslimhope.com but historycart is just sort of the historical parts of it. But the stuff I'm saying today can be found all at historycart or also on biblequery.org.

Larry. Now it's interesting you said something about Islam there and pertaining to your websites. Now it seems that Islam might have had an impact on the church from about 600 and on, 600 AD and on. Do you see any of that reflected in early church history?

Steve. Prior to 600 AD, none whatsoever but starting with John of Damascus who with his relative, I believe, his uncle was the one who let the Muslims into Damascus, and it gets more, it's complicated interaction but from that time on, there was that and also some effort to read back into early church history stuff that wasn't really there as we'll find out a little bit later today.

Larry. All right. Well, today's subject is Athanasius. Now what's interesting about him is we even mentioned him in one of our ministry newsletters which I'm holding up right now, our Christian Answers Newsletter, Christian Debater Guide, Volume 2, Number 2 way back. Of course, I felt in these newsletters we did over the years, over the decades, that certain topics weren't being addressed enough by Christian churches in general. So this one was on the "Testimony to the Eternal Godhead, the Trinity." And of course, the lead article is by Dr. Edward Bickersteth, author of the book "The Trinity," and of course, this has a lot of excellent material in it starting with what the Bible says about the Trinity, and as we go through from page to page here, oh, here on page 5 our viewers at home can see you there, Steve, "Simple Seven Facts About the Trinity" from your article, excellent article on the Trinity there, and on that very same page on page 5 next to Steve's article,

we find the Athanasian Creed down here on the lefthand side of the page on page 5, and it says right there,

"We we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father is eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. And in this Trinity none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal together, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must think of the Trinity." Quoted from "Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology and Ecclesiastical Literature," New York, 1871, by John McClintock and James Strong, volume 11. I guess that's volume II, page 560-561.

Now people at home were just seeing the Athanasian Creed and with that is a set up, I'd like you to begin our analysis on Athanasius.

Steve. All right. Athanasius is a complex and interesting guy. He's a good clinician. He wrote a ton about the Trinity and what he wrote was good. Actually, though, curiously enough that the Athanasian Creed as far, as we know, was not actually written by Athanasius but is consistent with everything he taught. But he had such a stature as kind of a giant among Christian theologians that I found in my study of church history that he has kind of a unique place. I mean, there are, you know, maybe, oh, 800-900, you know, prominent theologians and writers throughout church history and some of them like Augustine are very big in Roman Catholicism, they're also very big among Protestants, Greek Orthodox not really at all, they don't like what Augustine said about sin. Others like John Chrysostom are very very big with the Eastern Orthodox but they aren't really very prominent or well-known with Roman Catholics or Protestants, though Chrysostom was an outstanding expository preacher. But there's one guy who's kind of held in high esteem by all groups and that is Athanasius. Everybody liked Athanasius. Roman Catholics refer to him. Protestants really refer to him, not just us but others too. Not only that, the Copts really considered him one of their own. He's from Alexandria. They liked his stuff, they studied his stuff, and Nestorians also really like Athanasius so everybody pretty much kind of liked Athanasius and with all that, what actually did he say and was Athanasius really a Roman Catholic? Was he really an Eastern Orthodox? Was he really an Evangelical or a Copt or a Nestorian? And it turns out, this is kind of the summary version of this talk, he wasn't completely any of those but we will see that he was as close to, you know, kind of one thing as he was another.

Larry. Isn't there a Scripture that says beware when all men speak well of you?

Steve. Well, if you never criticize anything, that's true, but another way to beware of that is that if they all speak well of you, then they might have a rosy-eyed view of what you said and not pay attention to some of your actual words and I think that's kind of what happened here after he dies.

Larry. Okay, I've got you.

Steve. I've read all of his writings which are pretty much in this book and a few additional things, and there's also some stuff they claim to be by Athanasius but is not by the early Athanasius from Alexandria. There are at least two other people in later times also named Athanasius.

There's another thing he called the "Life of Anthony" which may have been by Athanasius. We're not sure, kind of the jury is out on that, but there is a probability it was and I looked at that too.

All right, I don't kind of care for Athanasius, calling him Athanasius the Great which is what the Eastern Orthodox call him because it's too easy for people to idolize saints. But that being said, Athanasius really was a great Christian and he had a very positive impact but his teaching had a few, some flaws too. So this video today is going to show Athanasius' teaching and we can see how he says some things that might be uncomfortable for Eastern Orthodox, some might be uncomfortable as far as Nestorians and Copts and, yes, some things might be a little uncomfortable for Evangelicals and also as well as Roman Catholics. So we'll see what he has to say.

First of all, let's talk about some of his really positive contributions and good teachings. On the Trinity and the nature of the Christ, he wrote against Arians. Now Arians believed that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were God but they believed that Jesus was of a different substance or else a lesser substance or else a similar substance, not the same substance as God the Father, almost like some kind of demigod. And Athanasius wrote against that and he wrote a whole lot about that and what he wrote was good stuff.

He also wrote some about the sufficiency of Scripture, you might call it *prima scriptura*. He said that we should meditate on Scripture day and night and he quotes Psalm 1:1-2. For example in "Easter Letter 5," chapter 1, page 517, also "Easter Letter 11," chapter 6, page 535. Here's a good quote from him, "But since the holy Scripture is of all things sufficient for us, therefore recommending to those who desire to know more of these matters, to read the divine word, I now hasten to set before you that which most claims attention, and for the sake of which principally I have written these things." This is "To the Bishops of Egypt," 356 AD, chapter 1.2, page 225.

Okay, since Scripture is sufficient, there would be no essential doctrine of Christianity that's missing from Scripture and, of course, that would include venerating pictures of people. And we're going to see everything Athanasius said about venerating icons, actually he said nothing whatsoever but we'll get to that later.

All right, so Athanasius stressed the primacy of Scripture. All right, some people would like to say that maybe that meant *Sola Scriptura*. Well, to be honest, he did not actually go that far. He recognized the authority of bishops also, so he said, "if you really believe that all bishops have the same or equal authority and you do not, as you assert, account them as part of the magnitude of their cities." He wrote this in "Defense Against the Arians," chapter 2.25, page 115. It also says, "It is this that has thrown the churches everywhere into such confusion for pretences have been devised, and bishops of great authority and of advanced age have been banished for holding communion with me." This is his "Defense before Constantius," chapter 13, page 243, when he endured a lot of opposition from the Arian bishops who had been appointed there essentially by the Emperor, okay? And then Athanasius talked about how some stand against his ecumenical council, in this case the Council of Nicea, "On the Councils," chapter 33, page 468.

So Athanasius viewed the councils and bishops as having authority also, so you really can't say *Sola Scriptura* for Athanasius. He also said that the bishops, the church could not hold together without bishops in "Letter 49," to Dracontius, which is chapter 4, page 538. He also said, "inventors of unlawful heresies who indeed refer to the Scriptures but do not hold such opinion as the saints have handed down and received from them as the traditions of men, err, because they do not rightly know them nor their power." So he's talking about traditions here. So "Easter Letter 2," chapter 6, page 511. He appealed to apostolic tradition in "Letter 51," page 561-562.

So Athanasius believed Scripture was true and he believed Scripture had authority but he also believed Scripture had a sufficient authority, and this sounds just like what Evangelicals say. But on the other hand, he was called Pope Athanasius actually before any pope was called in Rome. He was strong in the authority of bishops in the Nicene Council. So it's sort of like what an Eastern Orthodox person says. So on one hand he says more like Evangelicals like to hear, on the other hand he says more like something the Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic would like to hear.

How do we reconcile these two parts of Athanasius? And I think the best way is let's let Athanasius reconcile those two parts himself and what he says, "For although sacred and inspired Scriptures are sufficient to declare the truth while there are other works of our blessed teachers compiled for this purpose, if he meet with which a man will gain some knowledge of interpretation of Scriptures and be able to learn what he wishes to know, still as we have not at present at hand the compositions of our teachers, we must communicate in writing to you what we learned from them, the faith namely of Christ the Savior thus any should hold chief the doctrines taught among us or think faith in Christ unreasonable." This is in "Athanasius Against the Heathen," written 318 AD, part I, chapter 1.3, page 4.

So Evangelicals believe that early Christian writers were not infallible, however their good teachings can be a reminder of Scripture and a check on our interpretation of

Scriptures. So we don't know that Athanasius really put these two together completely correctly but he was certainly on the right track with the primacy of Scriptures.

Now let's move on to see what Athanasius thought about pictures of God and statues. Okay, now kind of a reminder from our earlier show, the Roman Catholic Church, they will venerate statues and images of icons. The Eastern Orthodox Church does not venerate statues but they do venerate pictures or images of saints or Christ or, you know, things like that. So Athanasius said not to portray the deity in human or animal form. Here's what he said, "And generally if they conceive the deity to be corporeal so that they can try for it and represent belly and hand or feet and neck also and breast and the other organs that go to make man, see to what impiety and godlessness their mind has come down to have such ideas of deity.... But these and like things are not properties of God but rather of earthly bodies." He said this in "Against the Heathen," chapter 22, page 15 and 16.

He also goes on to say, "For ye carve the figures for the sake of the apprehension of God, as you say, but invest the actual images with the honor and title of God, thus placing yourself in a profane position." This is "Against the Heathen," chapter 21.1, page 15.

So all Eastern Orthodox believe this about statues, and the Greek Orthodox but not completely the Russian. They consistently believe that you should not have pictures of God the Father. Russian Orthodox, they have taught on one hand they shouldn't have pictures of God the Father but they have the very famous icon that has a picture of God the Father as a man and a picture of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as three men talking with Abraham. All right, but regardless they venerate pictures of the saints and Athanasius was totally unaware of any Christian doing anything like this.

Larry. It's just not what the Scripture would have us to go with. When you think about idols, you have references like in 1 Chronicles 16:26, 1 Corinthians 10:19-22, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6. And then what we have here, I just wanted the viewers at home to see this, you look in Deuteronomy 7:1-6, you people at home can see the references there to all these pagan idolaters and things like that, but then you see there that, "Thus shall ye deal with them. Ye shall destroy their altars and break down their images and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire." You can also see in 2 Chronicles 34:3-7, we find once again mention about the cutting down the groves, carved images, and molten images, break in pieces and make dust of them. You know, scatter that dust over the graves of them who sacrifice to them and so forth. You're basically told about to cut down all the idols, struck the land of Israel, return to Jerusalem as one of the kings of Israel, I think it was Josiah here.

So you have plenty of references in the Scripture about the idolatry and to many of these references I just gave are clearly anti-Israel, or as we can look at in modern day, anti-Christian practices. It's sort of like if the Jehovah's Witnesses built altars and idols and statues and pictures or the Mormons did it, you know, we clearly think, well, they're not Christians to begin with and that's what we're looking at here, these people were not real Israelites, they're worshipping other gods. But at the same time, you think about what John

says in 1 John 5:21, he says, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Amen, and there's plenty of other references. But you can have idolatry within what's called the Christian church and we're looking at these things that we know are outside the Christian church, but then the devil being so cunning as he is, can actually incorporate idolatry inside what's called the Christian church.

So we have to watch out on the outside and the inside. It kind of reminds me of what Paul warned the elders about there in Acts 20 about among your own selves shall come those who would have you seek after them and they'll cause division inside the church. So there's a problem there when it comes to idolatry whether inside or outside, there's a problem with those who call themselves Christians engaging and yet trying to excuse it as something else, and the pagan idolaters are doing basically the same thing that these guys are claiming to be Christians are doing, but, oh, for some reason it's different. But anyway, I could go on and on on all this. So anyway, I put in my two cents worth and so proceed, brother.

Steve. All right, well, thank you. So with idolaters and even kind of other people and the Arians, what did Athanasius say about persecuting others? Should you spread the truth by the sword? Well, here's what he said, "if it be a bad thing to flee, it is much worse to persecute for the one party hides themselves to escape death and the other persecutes with a desire to kill." This is "In Defense of His Flight," chapter 8, page 257. This is in the context of the Arians who were out to get him and kill him. So he was against persecuting others. He also says, "It is the true part of godliness not to compel but to persuade." And this is in "History of the Arians," chapter 67, page 29. If only the historical Roman Catholic Church had heeded Athanasius. Also, another kind of blight upon Augustine is that Augustine did support persecution of heretics but Athanasius says don't persecute anybody. So that kind of makes, to me makes Athanasius stand kind of head and shoulders above some other later people, okay?

Moving on. We looked at little individual points that were good teaching, let's look at things kind of overall. Athanasius wrote if you have a book about, let's say, this size, wrote about 468 pages, 56 of which were before the Nicene Council and in these 468 pages which is a lot of pages, it's actually pretty densely packed with good stuff. He wrote at least 576 teachings. There are four or more pre-Nicene Christians taught, none denied, and Christians today would agree with. That's a lot of stuff, okay?

Of course, Athanasius hit the big things like Jesus redeemed us by bearing our sins, rising from the dead, but even minor things like the abomination that cause desolation, Naphtali and Laban, you know, minor biblical characters. I mean, he knew Scripture backwards and forwards overall. There are about a total of about 1,100 or so teachings that four or more pre-Nicene Christians taught and none denied. And Athanasius wrote on more than half of that, all right? And these, by the way, if you want to see all of them, are at <https://www.biblequery.org/doctrine/doctrinalstatements/athanasiustaught.html>, and you look at html or.doc. Okay, and you can also see [www.biblequery.org/history/churchhistory/whatniceatoephesuschristianstaught.html](http://www.biblequery.org/history/churchhistory/whatniceatoephesuschristianstaught.html) or doc, and you can see Nicene and pre-Nicene Ephesus Christians taught including

Athanasius. And then you can compare that with what the early Christians taught at [www.biblequery.org/history/churchhistory/whatearlychristianstaught.html](http://www.biblequery.org/history/churchhistory/whatearlychristianstaught.html).

And have you ever read something and said, "You know, I'm not sure I agree with this," and then after you've pondered it a while, you say, "You know, that's absolutely right, and I changed my thinking and now I do agree with that." Well, I kind of had that moment, a moment like that reading Athanasius. Athanasius had a brilliant point, he said polytheism is atheism. Now I said, "Now wait a second." Okay, one god is not atheism but if you have multiple gods, that would seem to me on the surface farther in atheism than, you know, even one god. But Athanasius had a brilliant point here. You know, we believe as Christians that there is one eternal being who existed, all powerful and is a governor of all. He knows all. He can do whatever he wishes. Atheists believe that it's empty up there, so to speak, okay? Now polytheism typically has lots of gods and goddesses that act pretty much like people except with greater powers. I mean, think of the Avengers or something like that. They're just people that can do special things. But behind the gods, most polytheists also believe it is "empty." Athanasius said, "For the rule of more than one is the rule of none, for each one would cancel out the rule of the other and none would appear ruler, but there would be anarchy everywhere." So I thought, that's a brilliant thought, that if you believe in tons of gods and goddesses, no one who really made everything, who is eternally existing and everything like that, and they're really no better than an atheist who believes that there are beings with some special powers.

Larry. I've always kind of agreed with that without knowing Athanasius that made this very enlightening statement about it, because I've always looked at most religionists that don't really take, they don't really take Christ that seriously or the biblical gospel, as practical atheists. In other words, they claim to be Christians, let's say, but yet they don't really live their lives from day to day as if there's a God at all. They think maybe going like I used to be doing before I became a Christian on May 16, 1981, I was raised in the Christian church but I was a nominal one and I thought, well, if I go to church on Christmas and Easter, most of the time I skipped Easter and I'd just go at Christmas, that that was good enough to get me into heaven, you know, because that's sort of like a fire insurance policy, you know? You know, I'm tipping my hat to God. Oh, okay, and that's good enough but the rest of the time, I was living like an atheist basically. I was living like God's way over here in some box and I'll bring him out at Christmas time, I'll go and give him a little worship and then I'll put him back in a box and not worry about him and I'll live my life the way I jolly well please, and that's what a lot of religionists do. So sort of like what Athanasius is saying here, a lot of these people are practical atheists even though they have some claim about a deity but there will be multiple gods like Mormons or a singular god like Jehovah's Witnesses or whatever else is out there.

Steve. Well, with all this stuff that Athanasius wrote and he wrote on a ton of topics, there are some things that Athanasius was silent about and one of these is kind of interesting. For example, unfortunately Athanasius never affirmed or denied that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Evangelicals sure wish he would have said that but he actually didn't say that.



The other thing he's silent on and we'll look at this in more detail, is he said nothing about venerating images. He didn't speak really against it because he'd never heard of it. All right, so in his writings he never mentions venerating images of Jesus or people or anything else. However this was "fixed," and let me tell you how it was fixed. The historian Agapius reported in 593 AD, now this is a couple centuries after Athanasius, he records this story about a Jewish person who rented the house of a Christian and he found a picture of the virgin Mary in the house and so he urinated on it, and after that was discovered, the Jews were expelled from the city, okay? Now so far I've told you nothing that relates to Athanasius who died in 373 AD. However some years later, an anonymous legend tells the same story essentially with Jewish persons renting a Christian's house, saw an icon of Christ and the crucifixion was reenacted on the icon because the icon bled, and then the Jews and those around them were converted. This was told by a Bishop Athanasius who this is a different guy who went to the seventh ecumenical council which is called the Council of Nicea II, which is in 787 AD. Now note this Athanasius was 400 years after Athanasius of Alexandria. Now at least one Greek Orthodox person thought this was the same Athanasius as the first Council of Nicea. I was told this in an email, but also you can see this at <https://phoenicia.org/statueandicon.html> for more info.

So there's a different guy named Athanasius who lived over 400 years later who basically took kind of a legend that was told in one way and then added on later, and it was told by a different guy named Athanasius and some people have projected that back to the original Athanasius and said, "Aha, Athanasius did talk about icons after all." Well, different Athanasius. And also there's some question as did the later Athanasius really say this or was just his name put on it too, okay?

Another thing that Athanasius never said in all the writings that he had, even things like Laban which who, you know, is just a minor character in Genesis, he never talked about ever praying to Mary or the saints. Now this got "fixed" too. There is a very famous "Prayer of Athanasius to Mary" in later Roman Catholic writings. So you say, "Aha, Athanasius did pray to Mary." However there's no reference where Athanasius ever wrote or said this. Likewise, there is a Homily on Papyrus of Turin 71, 216 in Gambero, that's 106. It's supposedly by somebody named Athanasius. It doesn't say which Athanasius and we do not know who claimed it was by any Athanasius.

Now the other thing is that when you look at Eastern Orthodox writings, this prayer of Athanasius, remember Eastern Orthodox really like Athanasius, they have no mention of this, at least not that I've seen anywhere. So this thing, I think, was made up by the Western church and then the Eastern church said, "No, we'll just reject these spurious things."

Okay, so he was silent on these crucial things in the writings that we do have, but these are so important to the gospel, they're so important to Christianity and he was totally silent, I think his silence speaks volumes here.

Larry. Definitely, because if they were so important, he would have definitely mentioned all of that, praying to Mary and so forth.

Steve. I would prefer just to stop here, say Athanasius is a great guy and he's almost never wrong, and end of story. Well, we can't stop here. We're going to go on and see the stuff that he said and I have a little code here in that when you see something that says, O, that means the Eastern Orthodox or Orthodox would disagree with it. R means Roman Catholics disagree. E means Evangelicals would disagree. And if it's in lowercase, that means some would agree and some disagree.

So one thing that Evangelicals think is of poor terminology is calling Mary the mother of God or it can be translated Mary the bearer of God, in Greek it's calling Mary theotokos. Okay, and Evangelicals would disagree with that. They'd say, "Yes, Mary certainly was the mother of Jesus and Jesus is totally divine," but they would say, "but she's not really the mother of God the Father and Mary is not the mother of God the Holy Spirit," and actually Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, they don't say Mary's the mother of the Father, the Holy Spirit either but when you say mother of God, it just seems kind of like too imprecise a language.

All right, so here's what Athanasius said. "John, while yet in the womb, leapt for joy at the voice of Mary, mother, bearer of God." This is "Four Discourses Against Arians," Discourse 3, chapter 26, page 411. Also chapter 33, page 412. And also another reference too.

Also, here's a quote from him, "Whence also whereas the flesh is born of Mary, bearer of God, he himself," referring to Jesus, "is said to have been born who furnishes to others in the origin of being." So he's kind of showing the paradox of how Jesus was born of Mary and yet Jesus created the universe. So he said Mary was the bearer of God in "Four Discourses Against Arians," Discourse 3, chapter 34, page 412.

So Eastern Orthodox, Coptic and Roman Catholic, they all say that Mary was the bearer of God. The Council of Ephesus in 431 AD pronounces anathema not only against Nestorius who denied that, but also against all who don't anathematize those who deny that. So if you don't say that Mary was the bearer of God or you don't say the people are cursed of God if they don't say Mary is the bearer of God, then you are accursed of God according to the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. You know, I'm not so sure I really like the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD.

Larry. It's like the Judaizers that Paul railed against in the book of Galatians, particularly in chapter 1 there, verses 6 through 9, because they were just, as far as we know about the Judaizers in Galatians, their only beef was to say, "Well, if you're going to be a real Christian, you've got to be circumcised." [unintelligible] anything else beyond that and we can read it in Galatians outside of circumcision, but that seems to be just a simple add-on to the gospel, but Paul says blast them for doing that and anathematize them for adding just that one little thing of circumcision. Now here's the Council of Ephesus adding for you to damn these guys over here for holding something that disagrees with us

over there, well, then, you're going to hell. You know? And the other qualifications to the gospel just for the fact that if you're don't, you're going to hell if you don't agree with what we say here, and that seems to be going far beyond what we see the Judaizers do but Paul so vociferously denounced.

Steve. Now what Nestorius did was messed up on the nature of Christ, the fact that they kind of went overboard with that. Now let me try to explain especially to Eastern Orthodox, why it is that Protestants don't like the term mother of God or bearer of God. First of all, it's not scriptural. There are so many titles of Jesus and there are so many things in Scripture that we need to believe and follow just like, well, why do we need to add this thing that was a term coined by man? Now as long as you understand about the Trinity and the divinity of Christ and those particular things which Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, Copts and Nestorians agree upon, you know, that's good, but this term is not really scriptural.

Also as I said earlier, you know, the bearer of God. She's the bearer of Christ, I'll be happy to say that, but I don't like to say anything that sounds like she's the bearer of the Father and the Holy Spirit. At least that will confuse, can confuse some non-Christians, even though the other groups don't believe that Mary was the bearer of the Father or the Holy Spirit either. So if it's kind of a term that leads to misconceptions, why use the term if it's not even scriptural? Okay? So why don't you just call it the virgin Mary is the mother of the Son of God, you know? Why can't we just say that? That would be fine.

Another thing that Athanasius said is he said Mary was ever-virgin, meaning that she didn't have any children ever beside Jesus, of course, and he said this in "Four Discourses Against Arians," Discourse 2, chapter 70, page 386-387. He was not the first. Prior to him we know of two writers who also affirmed this, Hippolytus and Peter of Alexandria. Peter of Alexandria lived about the same time as Athanasius, just a little bit older. So Evangelicals would be against that because, you know, the New Testament talks about Jesus' brothers and sisters and James was a brother of Jesus, you know, half-brother. But then at least Roman Catholics say, oh, that, you know, brothers and sisters must be cousins there because if it meant real brothers and sisters, then they couldn't believe Mary was an ever-virgin.

Now Matthew 1:25 doesn't say that Joseph had no union with Mary, he said Joseph had no union with Mary until Jesus was born. And also it mentions Jesus' brothers in Matthew 12:46-47, Matthew 13:55, Mark 3:31-32, Luke 8:19-20, John 2:12, John 7:3-10. Okay, with all these places, the idea that they're cousins is not mentioned once in the Bible or in pre-Nicene writers. The word is not unknown. The word cousin is in the New Testament, Colossians 4:10, but not relating to Jesus. So if they were cousins, the Bible just could have said cousins, you know, but it said brothers, and when the Bible and later church tradition contradict each other, we should believe the Bible.

Larry. Correct because look at a situation where you marry your wife and then she has a divine interaction with the Deity, has a child, and then you're expected, I mean, this marriage for the rest of your life never to, you know, come together with your wife for

that entire time, even that is inconsistent with the way God has things set up when it concerns marriage, we're to be fruitful and multiply. That's part of what marriage is about. Yeah, this doctrine here that's saying, "Well, Joseph, no you can't, you can't do anything with your wife now. You've just got to, you know..." That doesn't make any sense in the biblical context of what we know from Scripture in the Old Testament, New Testament.

Steve. So Evangelicals would differ with what Athanasius said about that.

Larry. Yeah, plus Athanasius is just wrong on that point.

Steve. Right. Yeah, and unfortunately it's not the only place. Here's a place that Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Evangelicals in reading Athanasius in this part would all say that he was wrong. Okay, Athanasius was kind of Nestorian leaning in one spot. When it says that no one knows the day or the hour of Christ's return, not the Son, only the Father, then Athanasius says, "but why though he knew, he said, 'No, not the Son knows.'" And he said, "This, I think, none of the faithful is ignorant, viz. that he made this as those other declarations as many by reasons of the flesh." Nestorians teach us and Nestorius himself, it's kind of questionable how far he went with this but later Nestorians went farther. They teach that Christ had two wills in one body. It's like there was a human Christ and there was a divine Christ. And so the human Christ submitted to the Father and the divine Christ, it was there was like two wills, almost like, not quite two beings but getting there. And while we say, no, Orthodox, Catholics, Evangelicals, and Protestants, they all say no, Christ had two natures, human and divine, but there's only one Christ. When we pray, we don't pray to two Jesuses, there's only one Jesus but Nestorians kind of split up in the two wills in a way that's kind of weird and is unbiblical, okay?

Anyway, let me go back to this quote and see if this sounds uncomfortably Nestorian to you. "but why though he knew, he said, 'No, not the Son knows?'" "He," here being Christ. "This, I think, none of the faithful is ignorant, viz. that he made this as though the other declarations that many are by reason of the flesh. For this is as before is not the words that Christians see but of that human nature whose property it is to be ignorant.... Certainly when he says in the gospels concerning himself and his human character, 'Father, the hour is come. Glorify thy Son,' it is plain that he knew also the hour of the end of all things as it were, though as man he is ignorant of it, for ignorance is proper to man and especially the ignorance of those things.... for since he was made man, he is not ashamed because of the flesh which is ignorant to say, 'I know not,' that he may show that knowing as God but he is ignorant but ignorant according to the flesh and therefore he said, 'No, not the Son of God knows,' lest the Godhead should seem ignorant but simply, 'No, not the Son,' that the ignorance might be the Son as born from among men." So if you can, this is in "Four Discourses Against the Arians," Discourse 3, chapter 43, page 417.

So if you can follow this contorted thinking, it's like the Son of God was not ignorant but the Son of man was, so we're talking about two Sons here in one body. Okay, I really

don't like this and I think any Christian from the Council of Ephesus on that took up the Nestorians wouldn't like this either. So this is kind of a problem. You know, did Jesus know or did he not know? Well, Athanasius says yes on one hand, and no on the other hand. Yes, as far as the Son of God knew, but the Son of man didn't know. Well, they're the same one, okay?

One can understand now why Nestorians admire Athanasius so much. Even though saying Mary is the bearer of God is anathema of horrible to Nestorians, they still like Athanasius despite that because he said this, okay. Now what the Bible says, though, the Bible never even hints that Jesus was two beings or two minds in one body. Colossians 2:19 says the fullness of God dwelled in him, Hebrews 1:3 says that the Son is an exact representation of God's being. Yet Hebrews 2:14 says he shared in our humanity, and Hebrews 2:17 says that Jesus was made like us in every way. So the Bible is clear there are two natures but not two wills. So the mystery of the Incarnation is that Jesus was every bit as human as we are, except without sin, and he is every bit as much God as the Father.

Larry. Well, that's tying in with these historical Christian doctrines of the hyperstatic union of Christ. So that's why Nestorianism is considered a heresy in this regard.

Steve. And the opposite extreme of Nestorianism is monophysitism, and the Council of Ephesus in 431 kicked out the Nestorians and the Council of Chalcedon kicked out the monophysites.

So I looked through Athanasius' writings and can say, well, can I find some teachings that are more monophysite than they are Orthodox, and at least in my reading, I've not found anything that was monophysite leaning but only Nestorian leaning.

Now another thing that Roman Catholics and Evangelicals and Orthodox would disagree with, perhaps Copts and Nestorians too, though I haven't verified that, is Nestorians really admired the teacher Origen. Now Origen was one weird guy. If you think of the essential doctrines of Christianity, Origen affirmed all those, but he had some weird ways of allegorizing the Bible. He also believed that everyone would eventually go to heaven maybe after being in hell for a while, including Satan. He didn't believe in reincarnation, he was against that, but he believed souls preexisted. Athanasius, in my opinion, admired Origen too much.

Here's what he said, "And concerning the everlasting co-existence of the Word with the Father, and that he is not of another essence or subsistence, but proper to the Father's, as the bishops in council said, you may hear again from the labour-loving Origen also. For what he has written as if inquiring and by way of exercise, that let no one take as expressive of his own sentiments, but of parties who are contending in investigation, but what he definitely declares, that is the sentiment of the labour-loving man." This is "In Defense of the Nicene Definition," chapter 27, page 168.

Okay, now there are at least five other pre-Nicene writers who were Origenists, so this was kind of a problem with early Christianity in that they liked him too much, including Athanasius, and others saw there was a problem here.

Another thing that Athanasius said that I really don't like is he talked about the collective guilt of the Jews. Okay, first of all, when Jesus was at the trial and you remember when the crowd of people, Pilate asked and said, "Do you want to free Barabbas or free Jesus?" And they all said free Barabbas. You know, how many people were in that? You know, was it the whole city? Who was it? Well, it turns out that they have excavated where they think is the place that this happened and it could have held at most maybe 400 people, maybe 500, and a lot of them were probably hand-picked, you know, by the scribes and Pharisees to be there. So it's one thing to say that Jewish people, you know, were involved in crucifying Jesus, that's true, but to say the collective guilt of all Jewish people, that's not right. That's going too far.

Well, unfortunately Athanasius in 339 AD, he wrote about the desecration of the churches in Alexandria and he said, "They," meaning the heathen soldiers, that is non-Jewish, you know, pagans, "were burning the books of Holy Scripture which they found in the church, and the Jews, the murderers of our Lord, and godless heathen entering irreverently." He says, "O strange boldness! The holy Baptistry..." This is in "Circular Letter 3," page 94. Alright, this is regrettable that he kind of stereotyped the Jews as the murderers of our Lord, however the slight piece of good news, Athanasius did not say anything against the Jews or against Jewish people beside this, but I sure wish he hadn't said this either because this, you don't say this. This is not accurate to say about Jewish people.

Larry. Jesus' dialog with Pontius Pilate as found in the gospel of John 19, and when you look at verse 11 there, Jesus is talking to Pilate and he said, "Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." You can cross reference that to Matthew 23:14.

So when we think about the crucifixion story overall, Jesus himself said to Pontius Pilate that the ones who turned him over to Pilate were guilty of the greater sin. Overall, all I'm saying is the Jews are culpable in this thing just like the Romans and everyone else, but and this is all in the pretense and plan of God, but basically what you're saying, yeah, when I'm dealing with Jewish people on the street today or wherever, you know, I'm not looking at them the same way as back then with that crowd of scribes and Pharisees and Caiaphas, you know, and those guys that are plotting against Christ who were guilty of the greater sin. But we see the culpability of all these people against Christ at his crucifixion.

Steve. Well, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, the leaders, the scribes and the Pharisees were against Jesus but you remember all the people of the first church were all Jewish people. So yes, there was a great deal of guilt for the people involved but you don't extend it to an

entire race. Someone could be Jewish and they may not ever want to come to Christ and tell you so, and you can still be their friend.

Another thing that maybe isn't as serious about people but this is just a mess-up is he said that jealousy has no place with God. Athanasius said we should not ascribe jealousy to God in "Four Discourses Against the Arians," discourse 2, chapter 29, page 363. That sounds nice and logical and stuff except Scripture says the opposite. Scripture said God has jealousy, jealousy for people worshiping other idols in Exodus 20:5, 34:14, Deuteronomy 4:24, Deuteronomy 5:9, Deuteronomy 6:14, Joshua 24:19, Nahum 1:2, Zechariah 8:1, and 1 Corinthians 10:22. Athanasius was very well-versed in Scripture but he kind of slipped up here and sometimes people, even people today, Roman Catholics, Evangelicals, Orthodox, anybody, we can sometimes get so caught up in studying theology that we don't spend enough time studying Scripture and if Scripture disagrees with our theology, then that's an opportunity for us to grow and change our theology. When I find that my theological views don't agree with the Bible, I just want to go with the Bible and I think everyone ought to be a biblicist and we may not be interpreting things perfectly but that's why we kind of have each other, to keep each other in check, you know, to do that.

Another thing is that Athanasius was inconsistent on the Apocrypha. Now the Apocrypha isn't one thing. The Roman Catholic Church today has some Old Testament books that are not in the Protestant Bibles or the Jewish Bible, and they are called Apocrypha. Most people think that's all there is. Well, the Eastern Orthodox, they have books that are Apocrypha, that is, the same as the Roman Catholic plus a few extra books, and the Coptic church has some Apocryphal books that are in addition to that. So there are various books that some Christians have accepted as Scripture on a lesser level or even Scripture on the same level, and Athanasius rather than saying all that was wrong, why Evangelicals would go [unintelligible], he didn't actually say it was right. He was kind of inconsistent on it also.

So here's what he said about it. It's a little complicated. He said, "But since we have made mention of heretics as dead, but of ourselves as possessing the divine Scriptures for salvation, and since I fear lest, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, some few of the simple should be beguiled from their simplicity and purity, by the subtilty of certain men, and should henceforth read other books – those called apocryphal – led astray by the similarity of their names with the true books, I beseech you to bear patiently, if I also write, by way of remembrance, of matters with which you are acquainted, influenced by the need and advantage of the church." This is in "Easter Letter 2," 367 AD, chapter 2, page 551.

So what books would be Apocryphal books that he says aren't so good? So this sounds great from an Evangelical perspective so far, however in chapter 7, page 554, he says the books of Wisdom, Sirach, Judith, Tobit, which are in the Roman Catholic Apocrypha, Teaching of the Apostles, which is not, and the Shepherd, meaning Shepherd of Hermas, he said they are not included in the canon, so they're not a part of the Bible but he said

they are still good to read, okay? So he was like kind of positive toward them but they weren't really Scripture, okay?

Then in 367 AD and this is a long quote, I apologize. "But for the greater exactness I add this also, writing of necessity, that there are other books besides these not indeed included in the canon, but appointed by the fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. But the former," meaning Old and New Testament books, "are included in the canon, the latter are merely read, nor is there any place a mention of Apocryphal writings. But they are an invention of heretics who write them when they choose.... so using them as ancient writings, they may find occasion to lead astray the simple." This is in "Easter Letter 39," chapter 7, page 552.

Athanasius on one hand, he was writing against all these made-up books by heretics, and so he said stick to the canon, stick to the Scriptures which would be the Old and New Testaments that we have today. That sounds great, but then he adds but these other books are really good to read and so read these also. So if you stop here, it sounds like, okay, so he accepts that these aren't Scripture but they're good to read, however, maybe inconsistent with this, he also, Athanasius also quoted as Scripture Baruch, Wisdom, Sirach and two additions to Daniel. He quoted from Suaanna in Daniel also. So he quoted from Wisdom 6:24 and Sirach 1:8-9 as Scripture in "Four Discourses Against the Arians," Discourse 2, chapter 79, page 391.

He lists the books of the Old Testament like our list except he also has Baruch and Baruch, by the way, was a secretary of Jeremiah in "Easter Letter" in 367 AD, chapter 4, page 552. He quotes the Scripture of Daniel 14:5 which is the story of Bel and the Dragon, the dragon was this dead idol that a Babylonian priest, according to the story, you know, people make offerings to it, and he proved this dragon, you know, wasn't there. But anyway in "Four Discourses Against the Arians," Discourse 3, chapter 30, page 410, he quoted from the story of Susanna. In "Four Discourses Against the Arians," Discourse 1, chapter 13, page 314, and also in Athanasius on Psalms, and he quoted from Tobit 4:18 right after Matthew 6:6 and Isaiah 32:6. So he didn't actually say it was Scripture but he quoted it right in line with the other Scriptures with no delineation at all in "Defense before Constantius," chapter 7, page 244.

On some occasions he said they weren't Scripture but they're good to read, but in these cases said it was Scripture. So again, Athanasius lived a fairly long life and, I guess, maybe someone who lives that long can't always be consistent on everything.

Larry. Could you just tell for a moment our viewers about your Apocrypha section on biblequery.org?

Steve. All I did there basically is list different Apocryphas the different groups have and actually....



