

# (Biographies) Athanasius

by John Piper

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*John Piper's sermon on Athanasius highlights his unwavering defense of Christian doctrine amidst political and theological challenges.*

**Duration:** 1:21:05

**Scripture:** Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 1 Corinthians 9:22, 2 Corinthians 4:4, 2 Timothy 1:7, Hebrews 13:7, 1 Peter 3:15

**Topics:** "Sovereignty Of God", "Defending The Gospel"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of proclaiming the gospel in a way that challenges and transforms people's understanding. He cautions against simply presenting the basic truths of Christianity without addressing the fallen human mind's limitations. The speaker highlights several key principles, including God's sovereignty over all things, the accountability of all people before Him, and the inability of humans to come to Christ on their own. He also emphasizes the need to defend and explain doctrine for the sake of the gospel and to aim at creating biblical categories of thought that may not be readily understood by the current generation.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). Consider your leaders who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their faith and imitate their lives.

This is biblical mandate for biography and I take it seriously. And I ask now that among the untold number of things that you plan to do here now in this hour and in this conference, you would grant us to love the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God and is our everlasting satisfaction more because of this. I pray that you would make these pastors more courageous because of this and less fearful and anxious in dealing with the truth.

I pray that you will illumine our minds concerning the nature of truth and the way it should be expressed and defended in our day. I pray that we would know our times and render far-seeing service to the church. And I pray that we would stand against the world for the sake of the world, mingling properly, do not be conformed to this age, and become all things to all people.

And I pray that someday none would be missing from this room when we gather to be and see and delight and display the glory of Christ forever and ever with ever increasing joy. Help me now to be faithful to the truth concerning Athanasius and concerning our day as your word comes to bear on both in Jesus name. I pray.

Amen. A few comments about books and then we launch. This is the Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers Athanasius Selected Works.

Everything he wrote that's available is in here. So put this in your library. If you don't have the multi-volume set, you can get the one on Athanasius.

And I could mention individual works that are in here that are worth the whole volume, but maybe that later. And then this you can read in one sitting and it's a good overview of his life. Very popular written by a nun, I believe.

And I that was my first thing. I just jumped in here first last summer and loved it. Just got the big overview of his life because I don't know anything about Athanasius except contramundum.

And so and then the Holy Trinity, he didn't write this. This is the most recent big book on the Trinity that's been published. Bruce has a little accessible one that you can get at.

Your people will not read this one, but you might. And it's got a big chapter on Arius and a big chapter on Athanasius. And I got help from Robert Lethem or however you pronounce it, the Holy Trinity in scripture, history, theology and worship.

Athanasius was born eighty to ninety eight in Egypt and became the. Bishop of Alexandria, June 8, 328 at the age of 30. He was viewed by his people as the bishop of Alexandria his whole life long until he died at the age of seventy five and three seventy three.

And I say he was viewed that way because he wasn't always there as bishop. He spent 17 years of his 45 years as bishop in exile because he was banished by imperial forces five times from his country or from his city, at least. And nevertheless, all of the alternate bishops that the forces installed were never viewed as rightful bishops by the people.

He was deeply, deeply loved by his people, and they waited for him. Imagine yourself being forcefully evicted from your church for seven years and your people waiting eagerly until you came back and then welcoming you with palm branches after that seven year exile. We don't know much.

I think that's one of the reasons why there aren't more biographies. There aren't a lot of details about the life, just the controversies in the whole of our minute knowledge of his life. This is Archibald Robertson, who did the editing and wrote the biography at the front of this in the whole minute knowledge of his life.

There is a total lack of self-interest. The glory of God and the welfare of the church absorbed him fully at all times. The emperors recognized him as a political force of the first order, but on no occasion does he yield to the temptation of using the arm of the flesh, almost unconscious of his own power.

His humility is the more real for never being conspicuously paraded courage, self-sacrifice, steadiness of purpose, versatility, resourcefulness, width of ready sympathy were all harmonized by deep reverence and the discipline of a single-minded lover of Christ. And as we all know, the way that love this single-minded

love for Christ expressed itself was through a life of defending the deity of Christ over against the competing heresies. The war started in 319 with Arius, the deacon of Alexandria, writing a letter to Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, in which he argued that if the son is truly a son, then like all sons, he must have had a beginning.

And there was a time when he was not. Now, Arius wrote almost nothing that's preserved. We have three letters and a fragment.

So everything we know about Arius, we learn through those who were against him and. They were many and yet not as many as you might think, Athanasius was a little over 20. When that letter was written, Arius was 38 years older than.

The young Athanasius, which is a little lesson, I think in itself that. Older doesn't mean wiser always. That's one of the points of the section on Elihu in the book of Job as well, by the way, he wrote the deposition by which Arius was put out of his job.

And that was the role that Athanasius fulfilled the rest of his life. He was a writer in defense of orthodoxy for the next 45 plus years. 321, a synod was held in Alexandria and Arius was removed from his diaconate and declared to be a heretic by the bishops in the area of Alexandria and Egypt.

Eusebius of Nicomedia, that's up in Turkey, it's the same as Izmit, Turkey today, picked up the cause of Arius and was the head and center of the Aryan cause for the next 40 years in the eastern part of the empire by Eastern, usually the Roman Empire is like the Gauls over towards Spain and then the center part where Italy isn't an eastern means Turkey and Syria and around that direction. And to my amazement in this study, I realized that most of the bishops in the east during Athanasius lifetime were Aryan. This is not a marginal problem.

This was a major, major empire wide problem. Constantine, as you know, saw a sign of the cross in 312, was converted to Christ and issued the Edict of Milan, by which Christianity was made a legal religion and became very interested in ecclesiastical affairs because when the bishops aren't happy, it doesn't make well for the kingdom. And he didn't like this dispute at all.

And therefore he called the Council of Nicaea. And that's also up in Turkey, near Istanbul. He had an advisor named Hoseus and the Hoseus said, do this, we need to get this resolved.

And so 318, at least that's the traditional number, bishops came together as well as non bishops, which included Athanasius and Arius. Athanasius wasn't a bishop and Arius wasn't a bishop, but they were there and they worked for three months. You know, I thought in passing, I wonder if we could pull off councils like this today.

And they were there for May through August. What church would let us have four months off to go debate theology? And yet, if that happened, if you pulled together all the all the pastors you could for three months to debate contemporary issues, I just wonder if we might not get somewhere. But we'll see.

Let me read the creed of Nicaea. The Nicene Creed that we recite today, as you know, is not identical to the creed of Nicaea of three twenty five. It's identical to the creed that was tweaked at Constantinople three eighty one, which the Holy Spirit was filled out.

The anathema was dropped. A few refinements were made and that's what we recite. Let me read the original one.

This is very easy. You can read this in Greek if you've had one year. The Greek is is very simple.

And I want to point out a few things. We believe in one God, the father almighty maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the son of God, begotten of the father, the only begotten, that is of the essence of the father, case to Patras.

This would become mega important for years, decades. God of God, and light of light. Very God of very God.

They on on the new begotten, not made. Being of one substance with the father. And here it is, homosean toe pottery.

And you heard that that word homosean of one substance is very hard to use language that's adequate here, because if you say similar or same or even the word identical. Which is what Bruce was using. They could weasel on those.

They can weasel on those. And it was unbelievably difficult to find a word. And we'll come back to that issue of wording our doctrine so as to exclude weasellers by whom all things were made in heaven and on earth, who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate and was made man.

He suffered the third day. He rose again, ascended into heaven from thence. He cometh to judge the quick and the dead and in the Holy Spirit, period.

Now the anathema and those who say there was a time when he was not and he was not before he was made and he was made out of nothing or. Out of another substance or thing or the son of God is created or changeable or alterable, they are condemned by the holy Catholic and apostolic church, which was really an absolute exaggeration. I mean, this did not happen overnight.

There were 60 years of war after the Council of Nicaea, during which time whole decades went by where very few people affirmed this. Interestingly, all but two of the 318 signed it. Half of them threw their teeth duplicitous like many today.

Athanasius was mentored by Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria. He was there. He didn't formulate it.

He inherited it. He loved it. It was in his blood.

He spent all of his life defending Nicaea. And then his bishop died and he was in 328 now made bishop of Alexandria and under his influence, Arianism in that vicinity died away in a hurry, but not in the empire by a long shot. Most of the bishops who had signed the creed of Nicaea did not like Athanasius and they didn't like the way he said that people were heretics if they didn't believe this.

They were just kind of loosey goosey and they wanted peace. They were called political theologians. And so they did everything in their power over the next 40 years to get rid of this man.

And there was political intrigue all along the way. Let's begin and watch it happen. First, they accuse him of levying illegal taxes.

Then they accuse him of being ordained too young. And then they accuse him of using magic. And then they accuse him of subsidizing treasonable persons.

And finally, Constantine is so worried about all these accusations. He brings him to Rome, puts him on trial. He's acquitted.

And then the real intrigue begins. I'll give you just one story because it's the most remarkable. To get rid of Athanasius, the bishops, including Eusebius far away, conspire to get Arsenius, a bishop in Hypsoli, which is up the Nile River to the south, to disappear, hide in a monastery up in the desert.

And then they claimed that Athanasius had had him killed, cut off his hand and was using it for magic. Well, Constantine didn't know what to make of this. And so he called a council entire and the bishops gathered and they summoned Athanasius to account.

Well, Athanasius had a lot of friends in Egypt and he sent one of his deacons on one of these search and find missions and they found Arsenius. And so they smuggled him off to Tyre and kept him in secret while the trial was going on. And at the right moment, Athanasius asked, Did you know Arsenius personally? Yes, the bishops say.

And so they ushered Arsenius in with a big cloak on and the bishops demanded holding up the human hand. How did he lose his hand? Why did you cut off his hand? At which time they took off one hand's cloak and he held that up and another one and held that up, at which time Athanasius asked. And whence did they cut off the third hand? And believe it or not, this is the kind of people you're dealing with.

He was condemned and escaped in a boat with four other bishops and headed for Constantinople to make his case, if he could, with the emperor. And the emperor did not find sympathy with him because they trumped up another charge, namely that he tried to starve the king's capital by not letting wheat shipments leave Alexandria. And he was banished to Treveri, which is Trier near Luxembourg.

And he was there starting 336 A.D. Constantine died the next year and the empire was divided between Constantius, his son Constans, and Constantine II. He had three sons. They divided up Gaul, Italy and the east into those pieces.

And two of those emperors were happy with Athanasius and one of them wasn't. He was returned to his sea because they persuaded the emperor on his side to let him come back. But two years later, Eusebius, who's running the Aryan cause.

Persuaded Constantius to get rid of Athanasius, so he snatched ecclesiastical power, sent another bishop named Gregory to take over in Alexandria, put in his own secular governor there, Constantius did, and by force drove Athanasius out into his second exile. This was the longest time away, about seven years away from 339 to 346. And during that time, there was a council of Sardica held by the other two emperors who appreciated Athanasius in order to declare him vindicated.

And after several years, Constans threatened war on his brother Constantius if he didn't reinstate Athanasius in his bishopric. And so Constantius relented and he was back. And now he had 10 years of peace, basically.

And in those 10 years, poured his life out, loving his people and defending the cause of truth in Alexandria. Then Constans was murdered in 350 A.D. and that freed Constantius to go back to what he really believed

and oppose Nicene theology and oppose Athanasius. And so he drove him out again.

And this time it was very bloody. Let me read the account of the way they moved in on Alexandria and this bishop. On Thursday night, February 8, 356, Athanasius was presiding at a crowded service of preparation for a communion on the following morning in the church of Theonus, the largest in the city.

Suddenly, the church was surrounded and the doors broken in. And just after midnight, Sirianus entered with an infinite force of soldiers. Athanasius calmly took his seat upon the throne in the recess of the apse and ordered the deacon to begin the one hundred and thirty six psalm.

The people responding at each verse for his mercy endured forever. Meanwhile, the soldiers crowded up to the chancel and in spite of entreaties, the bishop refused to escape until the congregation were in safety. He ordered the prayers to proceed.

And only at the last moment, a crowd of monks and clergy seized the archbishop and managed to convey him in the confusion out of the church in a half fainting state, but thankful that he had been able to secure the escape of his people before his own. From that moment, Athanasius was lost to public view for six years and 14 days. And just a few months later, the bloodletting was huge as they came in with vengeance to try to find Athanasius and to put to death and imprison those who had followed him.

They forced a new bishop in. His name was George. He instigated a violent persecution and at last the people lynched George and killed him because of their exasperation at the way the city and the bishops and the clergy were being treated.

That was the mingling in those days of secular and ecclesiastical power. But at the darkest hour, there's a lesson here at the darkest hour for Athanasius and for the cause of orthodoxy, the dawn was just about to break. The third exile, this third exile that he's just now been launched into for six years proved to be the most fruitful of all of his times away.

He had spent a lot of his time up till now in the peaceful seasons visiting the desert monks. He loved the aesthetics and there formed a bond of deep friendship and they became his lifeline. Nobody knew where he was because the monks would never tell where he was.

And that was absolutely crucial, and therefore, for these years, he wrote all of his major works and half of everything in this volume was written during these these six years in exile. The Aryan history tracks against Aryans to Serapion on the councils of Arimin, the life of Anthony and so on. To me, it is one of the great ironies of history that the triumph over Aryanism would happen largely through the ministry of a fugitive living and writing inches from his own death.

Here's the way Archibald Robertson described the triumph of the third exile. The third exile of Athanasius marks the summit of his achievement. Its commencement is the triumph and its conclusion, the collapse of Aryanism.

The breakup of the Aryan power was due to its lack of reality. As soon as it had a free hand, it began to go to pieces. But the watchful eye of Athanasius followed each step in the process from his hiding place.

And the event was greatly due to his powerful personality and ready pen, knowing whom to overwhelm and whom to conciliate, where to strike and where to spare. His period then of forced abstention from affairs was the most stirring in spiritual and literary activity in the whole life of Athanasius. It produced

more than half of his entire extent works.

Let it be noted once for all how completely the amazing power wielded by the wandering fugitive was based upon the devoted fidelity of Egypt to its pastor, towns and villages, deserts and monasteries. The very tombs were scoured by the imperial inquisitors in the search for Athanasius, but all in vain. Not once do we hear of any suspicion of betrayal.

Pays to cultivate deep friendships in seasons of peace. He returned to Alexandria February 21, 362, having been gone for six years. Another irony about that is that he came back because Julian was now the emperor and Julian was the first really pagan emperor in a long time, and he brought him back and undid all those banishments of Constantius.

But that favor was very short lived. And when Julian discovered what kind of saint he was dealing with who didn't make a place for the gods, he also banished him into a fourth exile. And then he was brought back from that by a prophecy among the.

Desert monks who, on the very day that it happened, predicted the death of Julian in Persia, hundreds of miles away, proved to be true, and Athanasius came back and a few months later, six months later, he was driven out again that only lasted a few months, and he came back February 1366 and then spent the rest of his day seven more years. Loving his people, writing letters, especially around the empire to solidify the cause, and he died May 2nd, 373. So what I want to do is draw out lessons from this.

This is the part that I enjoy most. There isn't a lot of interesting detail to read about in Athanasius. I told you one interesting story.

There are many of those. But what is powerful are the implications of his life and the implications of the dispute compared to our day. And that's where I want to go now.

I have seven of these seven lessons to learn. Number one. Defending and explaining doctrine is for the sake of the gospel, the gospel of Christ's glory and our everlasting joy.

I changed the title from what was in the original brochure. I got that title because I didn't know I was going to run into this phrase he wrote in one of his letters, wherefore, considering that this struggle is for our all. Let us also make earnest care and aim to guard what we have received in that phrase, contending for our all gripped me.

There was no fight here for ecclesiastical power going on. There's no fight here in his case, anyway, for theological triumph. This was a deeply religious crisis involving the reality of revelation and redemption.

We are contending for our all. Everything is at stake. And oh, how thankful we should be that Athanasius saw things so clearly.

The incarnation and the deity of Christ has to do with the gospel. It has to do with salvation. It has to do with whether we have any hope or any life.

The creed that Athanasius helped draft. Embrace this sentence, we believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, begotten of the father, very God of very God, being of one substance with the father who. For us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate and was made man, he suffered and the third day he rose again.

There is no salvation if Jesus is not God. That's the lesson we should learn first, that this argument, this battle over the intricacies of homo oeconomicus is he really of one essence, one being with the father, or is it just like it is this hair splitting as Gibbon smeared that the empire almost split over an Yoda as though there's no difference between the words yes and no, because they're both short.

You hear people talk like that today. It had to do with the gospel and today it has to do with the gospel. That quote that you gave from Wainwright blew me away.

I said, thank you, Jeffrey, for saying something so right. Second lesson. Joyful courage is the calling of a faithful shepherd.

Joyful courage. That's you is the calling of a faithful shepherd. Athanasius stared down murderous intruders into his church.

Athanasius stood before emperors who could have easily killed him as much as him away to treachery. He risked the ire of parents because he recruited so many young virgins and so many young men into martyrdom. Because of their radical allegiance to the Nicene faith, Athanasius Contra Mundo should inspire every pastor to stand your ground meekly and humbly and courageously wherever biblical truth is at stake.

But. You sure you get this word? You should out rejoice all of your adversaries. If something is worth fighting for, it's worth being happy about.

It's worth rejoicing over. The joy is essential in the battle. Nothing is worth fighting for that will not increase our joy in God forever.

Our people need to see that. If you become sour in a battle, you're fighting the wrong battle. You got a battle at home on your knees to fight first before you go out and make cause for doctrinal orthodoxy.

Courage in conflict must mingle with joy in Christ. This is what Athanasius loved about Antony. I would like to give a whole message on Antony and Athanasius relationship to this desert father.

He wrote a whole biography of Antony. It's in there. It's worth reading because you get the flavor of what the ideals of Athanasius were by reading the way he talks about Antony.

And here's one of those excerpts. Let us be courageous and rejoice always. Notice the linking courageous and rejoice.

Let us be courageous and rejoice always. Let us consider and lay to heart that while the Lord is with us. Our foes cannot do us harm.

But if they see us rejoicing in the Lord, contemplating the bliss of the future, mindful of the Lord, deeming all things in his hand, they are discomfited and turned backwards. So, brothers. If there are times when you feel it is you contra Mundo.

Stand courageous and out rejoice your adversaries. Third lesson. Loving Christ includes loving true propositions about Christ.

What was clear to Athanasius was that propositions about Christ carried convictions that could send you to heaven or to hell. There were propositions like. There was a time when the son of God was not there

was a proposition like.

He was not before he was made. Or the son of God is created. These propositions were strictly damnable if they were spread, if they were believed, they would damn the souls of those who embraced them.

And therefore, Athanasius labored with all his might in page after page after page to find propositions that would conform to ultimate reality and lead the soul to faith and worship and heaven. I believe that Athanasius would have abominated with tears. I'm thinking Philippians three.

Have I not told you before, I say it with tears that their enemies of the cross is God is their belly. I think he would have abominated with tears the contemporary call for deep propositionalizing. That you find among some reformists, the emerging church, younger evangelicals, post fundamentalists, post foundationalists, post propositionalists, post evangelicals.

I think he would have said to them, our young people in Alexandria die for the truth of propositions about Christ. What are your young people die for? And if the answer came back. We die for Christ, not propositions about Christ.

I think Athanasius would have said, that's what area says. And which are you going to die for? Athanasius would have been grieved over sentences like this one. It is Christ who unites us.

It is doctrine that divides. Sentences like we should ask whom do you trust rather than what do you believe? He would have been grieved because he knew this was the very tactic used by the Aryan bishops to cover the councils with fog so that the word Christ could smuggle in anything. Those who talk like this, Christ unites, doctrine divides, have simply replaced a proposition with a word and they think they've done something profound.

And fresh, when in fact they've done something old and stale and deadly, which leads now to lesson number four, the truth of biblical language must be vigorously protected with non biblical language. The truth of biblical language must be vigorously protected with non biblical language. I did not expect to find this.

In the fourth century, Athanasius experience, as I read him over the last six months, was critically illuminating to me in the battles that I see around me today, illuminating with regard especially to liberally minded Baptists and pietists, liberally minded, Baptist, pietistic traditions who say, or let me put the conclusion like this. The slogan, the Bible is our only creed, is often used as a cloak to conceal the fact that Bible language simply carries Bible falsehood. You can use Bible language to say things that are false to the Bible.

The Aryans were experts at this. They affirmed every biblical sentence at Nicaea that could be brought forward. It was maddening to the Orthodox bishops.

Let me read it for you. The Alexandrians confronted the Aryans as a quote. With the traditional scriptural phrases, which appeared to leave no doubt as to the eternal Godhead of the sun.

But to their surprise, they were met with perfect acquiescence. Only as each test was propounded, it was observed that the suspected party whispered and gesticulated to one another, evidently hinting that each could be safely accepted since it admitted of evasion. If their assent was asked to the formula like to the father in all things, it was given with reservation that man as such is the image and glory of God.

The power of God elicited the whispered explanation that the host of Israel was spoken of as do not miss career and that even the locust and caterpillar are called the power of God. The eternity of the sun was countered by the text. This is the most absolutely staggeringly, unbelievably amazing with the text.

We that live are all way period. Second Corinthians four to. And since we're all way to say that the sun is all way, doesn't make him any more than we.

This is the way the Bible Bible language was being handled. By the Aryans. Effect.

Day after day, the issue of homo ocean was being forced. And it wasn't a biblical term. It just happened to be the only one available that would keep people from using biblical terms to say biblically false things.

R.P.C. Hansen explained the process like this, quote, Theologians of the Christian Church were slowly driven to the realization that the deepest questions which face Christianity cannot be answered in purely biblical language because the questions are about the meaning of biblical language itself. The Aryans. Oh, I've seen this railed against unbiblical language, sees the biblical high ground as pious and fundamentalist and biblical people who just want to say what the Bible says and not bring in external, pinching, clarifying, defining words of precision.

And light Athanasius saw through this postmodern, post conservative, post propositional strategy and save for us not just biblical words, but biblical truth. May God grant us the discernment of Athanasius for our day because very precious things are at stake. Lesson number five, a widespread and long held.

Doctrinal difference among Christians does not mean that the difference is insignificant or that we should not seek to persuade toward the truth and seek agreement. If someone had said to Athanasius, Athanasius, people have disagreed over this issue for 300 years and there never has been any official position on this that the church has ever taken. Establishing one side is orthodox or the other.

So who do you think you are? Half the bishops in the world disagree with you. It was more than half and they read the same Bible you do. So would you please stop fighting and making a ruckus and just learn to get along with diversity? What if that had been said? And we may thank God that Athanasius did not think that the amount of time that had elapsed or the number of Christians that disagreed defined how important the truth is or whether it should be fought for.

And so today we should not conclude that the absence of consensus in the church means doctrinal stalemate. God may yet be pleased to pour out a blessing of unity on some crucial area of doctrine not yet resolved. I mean, picture yourself with Athanasius.

There's no council to appeal to. Do you realize how much we lean on these councils? You wonder, why is he doing this conference? Nobody's really worried about this anymore. This is done.

They finished this 381 finish. It's over. And we do lean on them.

Thank God those people fought, but they had nothing to lean on. They had to decide, is this biblical? Is this central? Is this gospel? And we'll fight for it. And it makes me wonder today, there was no yet papacy.

There was nobody to say, get the council together just happened to be the emperor. It makes me wonder since there was no papacy, since Bishop Briggs were at war with each other all over the world and they pulled off something like a world council with 318 people spontaneously with a little bit of help from the

emperor. It just makes me wonder whether there might happen something like that.

I see the eyes, the closest thing I can think of in evangelicalism, international council and biblical inerrancy. That was an amazing thing back in the 70s that did a great work for the church in stating in a Chicago statement something about the nature of inerrancy. And though it had no official, you know, big, overarching ecclesiastical thing on it.

Thousands of us benefited from that collective wisdom. Might there not be a day in which God would be pleased to take some issues and make that happen? I think of manhood and womanhood issues. I think of justification by faith issues.

I think of the nature of how Christ saved sinners, atonement issues. I think of sovereignty of grace in conversion issues. And I'm simply not going to say stalemate.

2000 years hasn't done anything about this, so it won't happen. Who do you think you are to say it won't happen? Put yourself in Athanasius shoes, knowing that the whole world was almost here we are sitting in this room, many of us loving the same glorious doctrine. Athanasius couldn't have begun to pull together a group like this on the side of orthodoxy.

They didn't exist. There weren't that many bishops who believed in the deity of Christ. So lesson number five is do not use length of time elapsed or number of Christians disagreeing to say stalemate on any issue.

That's biblical and important. Number six. Lesson number six.

I have two more. Don't aim to preach only in categories of thought that can be readily understood by this generation. Aim at creating biblical categories of thought that are not present.

There's a key word in that I don't want you to miss. Maybe we're only don't aim to preach only in categories of thought that can be readily understood by this generation. Aim at creating biblical categories of thought that are not present.

Here's another way to say that, and I benefited so much from Andrew Walls, his books on missions, and he has a cluster of ideas that have really brought light, at least to an issue, if not all the solutions to the issue. And the two clusters are the pilgrim principle and the indigenous principle of the church. The pilgrim principle says.

Do not be conformed to this world, be transformed by the renewing of your mind, you've got to make new minds. And the indigenous principle says, I have become all things to all people that by all means I may save some. Those two principles do not fit together easily.

It's one of the reasons why there are worship wars and missy illogical controversies and church planting controversies church structure controversies because the counterculture and the accommodation culture principles do not mesh easily. Some what I'm pleading for is that you not sell out to the indigenous principle. But that you bring the pilgrim principle to bear powerfully some of the most crucial, precious truths of the scripture are counterintuitive to the fallen human mind.

They don't fit our heads. The Orthodox understanding of the Trinity is surely one of these. If the indigenous principle had triumphed in the fourth century, we would all be Aryan because it's far easier for the human

mind to say that the son, like all other sons, once was not and came into being than it is for the human mind to say the son has always been there with God and there's only one God.

But the Bible will not let its message fit into the categories we bring with our fallen finite minds. The Bible is relentlessly pressing on our brains to create new categories of thought, to fit the mysteries of the gospel. That's what preaching is.

You're a wimp if you sell out to the accommodation culture, inculturation principle. That's easy, easy to grow a church that way. Archibald Roberts points out with the conversion of Constantine and the Edict of Milan in three thirteen that gave legal status to Christianity is a quote, the inevitable influx of heathen into the church.

Now that the empire had become Christian, brought with it multitudes to whom Aryanism was a more intelligible creed than that of Nicaea. So if your front end preaching is all accommodation, you'll fill your church with people who don't have new minds and the pressure to shape those doctrines, to fit those people will be almost insuperable over time. Rather, I say alongside the biblical underline that the biblical principle of accommodation and contextualization, Athanasius would plead with us to have a deep commitment to the Pilgrim principle of confrontation and transformation and brain boggling, mind altering, recategorization of the way people think about reality.

That's the hard work of preaching. Easy to tell those stories and put everything in categories that the people already like. That's easy.

Takes no effort at all. But oh, to state the glorious gospel in such a way that it explodes their categories and holds on to them so that they know the best thing in the world is happening to them. That's a challenge.

We must not treat these two principles. Become all things to all people. And be transformed in the renewing of your mind, we must not treat those two principles as sequential, they start and continue together.

We must not assume that the first and basic truths of the Christianity fit in the fallen human unbelieving mind. Like, OK, we start with the start, this is one on one and it fits, it doesn't fit. If it fits, it isn't the truth.

Fallen human minds don't like one on one, two on one, three on one or four on one. We must not assume that these truths can be contextualized in categories of thought that are already present in the minds of 21st century unbelieving people. And only later, after they become Christian, can we begin to alter their way of thinking with more advanced truth as though the advanced doesn't fit and the basic fits.

It doesn't. It's not the case from the very beginning, we are speaking to them, God centered, Christ exalting truths that shatter fallen human ways of thinking. We must not shy away from this.

We must go after this and advance this to help our people, by the grace of God. Get new categories in their heads for understanding the basics and the advanced parts of the gospel from the beginning in the most winsome way possible. We must labor to create new categories.

Give me give you six or seven. Here they go. Number one, God rules the world of bliss and suffering and sin right down to the roll of the dice, the fall of a bird, the driving of a nail into the son's hand.

Yet. Though he will such sin and suffering, he does not sin, but is perfectly holy. There's a category to blow your brain.

It is not sin to will that sin happen. That is a category that must be in people's heads eventually and very near the front end, or they do not embrace the biblical God. Number two, God governs all the steps of all people, both good and bad at all times and in all places, yet such that all are accountable before him and will bear the just consequences of his wrath if they do not believe in Christ.

Category number three, all people are dead in their trespasses and sins and are not morally able to come to Christ because of their rebellion. Yet they are responsible to come and will be justly punished if they don't. Category number four, Jesus Christ is one person with two natures, divine and human, such that he upheld the universe by the word of his power while living in his mother's womb.

Category number five. Though committed by a finite person. And in the confines of finite time.

Sin is nevertheless deserving of an infinitely long punishment because it is the sin against an infinitely worthy God. And number six. The death of the one God, man, Jesus Christ, so displayed and glorified the righteousness of God that God is not unrighteous.

Proverbs 17:15, notwithstanding. To declare. Righteous, ungodly people who simply trust in Jesus, those are the kinds of mind boggling, category shattering truths that demand our best thought, our most creative labors.

We must speak them in a way that by the power of the word and the spirit, which will, I'm sure here tonight, create a place in the brain for them to find a home. And you can't do that, brothers. That's the only way to grow a church is to change the way people view the universe and everything in it.

We must not preach only in the categories that are present in our listeners minds when they come. If we do, we betray the gospel and conceal the glory of God. Finally, last lesson and the one that I have enjoyed most and the one that I give most thanks to Athanasius for.

We must not assume that old books would say some startling things are necessarily wrong, but may in fact have something glorious to teach us that we never dreamed. I was warned by numerous folks last year to watch out for Athanasius and they listed off all the defects. And that's one of the reasons I put the title in the folder that you were sent.

And I didn't find the problems as bad as I was told. And I've collected gobs and gobs of text on irresistible grace and on the fall and on the atonement that to me make Athanasius squarely orthodox on those as well. But I'm not going to go there.

I'm just going to go to the most controversial one. That is thrown up immediately when you say you're going to go back to the fathers, especially the Eastern fathers, and start profiting, you say, whoa, don't you realize they taught? I said, well, have you ever read them? You have any idea what that word means? And the word is deification, deification, divinization. Here's some quotes from Athanasius.

The sun was made man that we might be made God. Well, I can see you jerking that one out and saying heresy. Don't use this guy.

Dangerous or. He was not man and then became God, but he was God and then became man. To deify us, the Greek word is that a point, though, men.

That a point. Oh, very easy, right? Make God. But is it clear? That you make a God, make God, make divine, make like God.

What does that point mean? Is that really obvious? I mean, so quickly we write off a person because they say something with categories we don't use. You got to get inside Athanasius head and figure out what are you saying? What do you mean this troubles me that you say God became man, that man might become God, that's a troubling thing. And those guys didn't bat an eye.

I mean, were they really that heretical? Why aren't you batting eyes at this? And then you find second Peter one for. Which says that you may become partakers of the. That us who set us.

Divine nature. Anybody want to call Peter a heretic? Here's the way Athanasius explains that and other passages in John. It's beautiful.

John then thus writes, hereby know we that we dwell in him and he in us because he hath given us of his spirit and the son is in the father as his own word and radiance. But we, apart from the spirit, are strange and distant from God. And by the participation of the spirit, we are knit into the Godhead so that our being in the father is not ours, but is the spirits which is in us and abides in us.

What then is our likeness and equality to the son? The son is in the father in one way and we become in him in another and that neither we shall ever be as he nor is the word as we. Hmm, hmm. So maybe he's not so far off, in fact, might he not be seeing something we need to see in dealing with second Peter one for or Romans 8, 29, those whom he foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the first born among many brothers? I mean, this is a shocking thing to say.

I am the brother of the second person of the Trinity that ought to shock us. He's my brother. I'm in the family.

That's a shocking thing. So don't get Ben out of shape too quick with that up until you know, oh, how valuable to read old books. Or maybe he was thinking about Revelation 226, where using the Old Testament reference to the sun's rule, we are told if we conquer, we will rule the nations with a rod of iron.

Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. That's supposed to be spoken of Jesus and is spoken of us or even more amazing Revelation 321. When you conquer, you will sit with me on my throne.

That's unbelievable. How do you do this? That's heresy. If it weren't in the Bible that we're going to sit on the throne, we're going to judge angels now.

So what do you do? You read the whole book, a little princess here. C.S. Lewis wrote the introduction for on the incarnation by Athanasius. I don't know whether that is in print anywhere, but it's all over the Internet.

You can just type in C.S. Lewis introduction on the incarnation and you can read it. It takes 10 minutes to read. And he argues in there that this book as a classic is more readable than all the books that have been written about it in the last 2000 years.

And we're scared away from old books, he says, because we think because they're old, they're inaccessible. And he said the reason they're classics is because they're so accessible. Books that are not accessible die.

They go out of existence. Books that keep getting read generation after generation are called classics because they're readable. But you if you try to read the the P.H.D. dissertations about them, they're totally unintelligible.

And so Lewis is pushing on us. And you remember this quote. He said that every third book you read should be outside your own century.

That's really good advice because here's his rationale. Every it's not because the early ages had no blind spots. They just had different blind spots.

And so they tend to correct ours. We can see there's pure problem, but you might bump into something you'd never seen before because of the blind spots. He said it's something like in 200 years.

The common errors in our centuries right in 20th century will be shared by Hitler and President Roosevelt. And they don't have a clue that they're making the same mistake because it's just in the air. Oh, brothers, let's read old books.

He said it would be just as fine to read books two centuries from now, but you can't get at them yet. The only option we have for not being in our own blindness is old ones. New ones written in 2000, 220 would be just fine.

Read those, but you can't get at them. And so the only way to be free from the blindness of our own times is to read old books. And I'm bearing witness to the preciousness of this last point because he has helped me so much.

I feel like I've I've gone farther and I'm just going to share with you where I am right now and then you interact tomorrow at the by writing your questions for the panel tomorrow. But moving toward a conclusion, here's my last. It's the same.

We're on the same lesson. The old books will possibly reveal something beautiful to you. And here's the question deification raised for me.

I saw and then I read it in this book that deification is the Eastern church word for glorification in the West. And if you think through glorification, it's just as problematic because of the glory we're talking about is God's and to be glorified is not to be praised. It doesn't mean just God's going to praise you.

It means you're going to. And that's. Have it, be it, see it.

And that's the question. That's the question. And thinking about this question has been huge for me.

So the question is, what is the ultimate end of creation? What's the ultimate end of God in creating and redeeming? And I began by asking this, is it being or is it seeing that your wheel spin now? Go with me where I have been for the last several days, is it being or is it seeing that we are destined for ultimately? How do Romans eight twenty nine predestined to be conformed to the image of his son relate to John 17, 24? Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am to see my glory. How does relate to each other? Conformed the being language and the seeing language of the beatific

vision of God, which is the ultimate goal, should I be excited about what I'm going to be or what I'm going to see? And Athanasius helped me here. I thank God for Athanasius here.

I don't know anybody else talking about this, you know, so I got help. I'm inclined. You may have heard me say it.

I'm inclined to stress seeing rather than being. That's my present bent in my system development. It's always being developed.

I want to know more. I want to fix what's not right. I want to enlarge my view of God and universe.

And right now I'm in a place where I am emphasizing seeing because of John 17, 24, and because it helps me in so many ways. Athanasius wouldn't let me be content, right? He's pushing on me. He's pushing on me with texts about deification and glorification being language.

He's pushing on me and I'm struggling and I want to be biblical. Don't don't want to just defend my system. I want to be shaping the system biblically all the time.

So. Athanasius won't let me run away from biblical texts that stress the language of deification and glorification. And conformity to his image and me becoming something like that.

So here's my present conclusion. The ultimate end of creation is neither being nor seeing. But delighting and display the ultimate end of creation is neither being nor seeing.

But delighting and displaying, delighting and displaying the glory of God in the face of Christ and the displaying happens both in the delighting. Since we glorify most what we delight in most. And in the deeds of the resurrection body that flow from this delight in.

The glory of God, the display of God's glory. Will be in the end internal and external. It will be spiritual and physical.

We will display the glory of God by Christ exalting joy in the glory of God in the face of Christ. And by Christ exalting deeds done with our resurrection bodies. Creative things writing and making and building and playing all manner of working and relating and talking and singing and thinking.

There will be deeds done in the final state that will be external and visible and they will flow from a heart ravished with Jesus Christ. Therefore, I must now ask this question. How shall I speak of future being and seeing if I've said being Piper's being your being anything and my seeing and you're seeing anything are not the ultimate aim of God in creation, but you're delighting and you're displaying.

Are the ultimate ends. What shall I say? How shall I talk about the being and the seeing? And here's my effort by the spirit of God who dwells in us. Our final destiny is not self admiration or self exaltation, but being able to see the glory of God without disintegrating and being able to delight in the glory of Christ with the very delight that the father has in his own son.

That's as close to deification as I get. And being able to do visible Christ exalting deeds that flow from this delight and in this way. In being that kind of person able to see, able to delight, able to do things that come from and flow back to God, a wave of revelation of divine glory in the saints is set in motion that goes on and grows for all eternity as each of us sees Christ and delights in Christ with the delight of the father mediated by the spirit.

We will overflow with visible, visible actions of love and creativity on the new earth. And in this way we will see the revelation of God's glory in each other's lives in ever new ways, new dimensions of the riches of the glory of God in Christ will shine forth every day from new delights and new deeds. And these in turn will become new seeings of Christ and will elicit new delights and new doings, which will become new seeings, which will produce new delights and new doings, and they will produce more seeings.

And the wave will roll on forever and ever and ever with the revelation increasingly of the riches of the glory of God, which now brings us back to ask help once more from Athanasius and he gives it. We will discover in the ages to come that this. Goal was possible only because the infinite son of God took on himself a human nature.

So that we in our human nature might be united to him and display more and more of his infinite glory. We will find in our eternal experience that his infinite beauty took on human form so that our human form might increasingly display his infinite beauty. I am thankful to God that I did not turn away from Athanasius and the word deification.

There is here this is a quote from Calvin. There is here at this word and second, Peter, one for a grace, the magnitude of which our minds can never fully grasp. Thank you.

Athanasius and thank you, Father, and thank you, Holy Spirit. In Jesus name. Amen.

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