

Theologians You Should Know

Sunset Bible Church Adult Sunday School 2024

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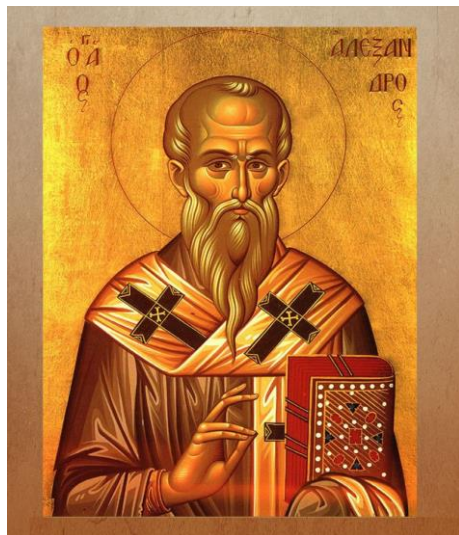
Week 3: Athanasius

"If the world is against the truth, then I am against the world." - Athanasius

"He stood for the Trinitarian doctrine, 'whole and undefiled,' when it looked as if all the civilised world was slipping back from Christianity into the religion of Arius—into one of those 'sensible' synthetic religions which are so strongly recommended today and which, as now, included among their devotees many highly cultivated clergymen. It is his glory that he did not move with the times; it is his reward that he now remains when those times, as all times do, have moved away." - C.S. Lewis

"The Eternal Word, the Son, was in no way degraded by receiving a human and mortal body. Rather, he deified what he put on; and more than that, he bestowed the gift of his divinity upon our humanity." - Athanasius

"The floor of Hell is paved with the skulls of bishops." - Athanasius



Athanasius

c. AD 296-373

Alexandria, Egypt

Main Works:

Against the Heathen

On the Incarnation

Against the Arians

Life of Antony

Major Events:

Council of Nicaea (325)

Appt. Bishop of Alexandria (328)

Council of Alexandria (362)

Class Schedule

2/18 - Introduction	3/17 - Anselm	4/14 - John Calvin
2/25 - Justin/Irenaeus	3/24 - Thomas Aquinas	4/21 - John Owen
3/3 - Athanasius	3/31 - (Break for Easter)	4/28 - Jonathan Edwards
3/10 - Augustine	4/7 - Martin Luther	Now go and theologize!

Athanasius

Athanasius, whose name means “immortal”, grew up in the midst of some of the most brutal persecutions of early Christians by the Roman Empire, including Diocletian’s “Great Persecution” of Christianity. Known as a “black dwarf” by his opponents due to his dark complexion and diminutive stature, he grew up under the tutelage of Alexander, who was bishop of the bustling metropolis of Alexandria, Egypt at the time. He is best known for opposing and defeating the heresies of Arius, a presbyter of the local church who “*failed to distinguish properly between the Father, Son, and Spirit. Instead, Arius began teaching that the Son was actually a created being, made by the Father to go on and create the universe. A brilliant propagandist, Arius put his theology into ditties, set them to well-known tunes and quickly whipped up popular support for his views.*”¹ Like today, falsehood spread quickly.

Athanasius serves as a great example of the importance of accurate theology to defeat heresies/false teachings. “*Athanasius lived when the blood of the Church’s earliest martyrs was still fresh in the memories of Christians—and the intensity of his faith was a tribute to those who had suffered and died rather than recant the apostolic faith. He is described by biographers as being small in stature and stark in appearance, with a body that bore clear signs of his rigorously ascetic life. Athanasius was an Egyptian, his skin dark, eyes deep set and piercing, with a mind as penetrating as his gaze. He did not suffer fools. His disposition challenges our conception of holiness as being nice and well-mannered. Athanasius was more than willing to fight if provoked...The great issue that was dividing the Church at the time was Arianism, a heresy that purported that the Lord Jesus was less than God—not, as our creed professes, ‘God from God and Light from Light...consubstantial with the Father’; instead, Christ was akin to something like the demigods of pagan mythology. Athanasius would have none of this... The witness of St. Athanasius clarifies just how much theology matters.*”²

Far from being a detached, ivory tower academic, Athanasius was concerned with the truth that could be grasped by the average believer. Two of the main works of Athanasius, *Against the Heathens* and *On the Incarnation* (two volumes of a single work), were written for a recent convert as a basic introduction to Christian faith, making them very pastoral. In *On the Incarnation*, he explains why the humanity of Christ matters: “*The body of the Word, then, being a real human body, in spite of its having been uniquely formed from a virgin, was of itself mortal and, like other bodies, liable to death. But the indwelling of the Word loosed it from this natural liability, so that corruption could not touch it. Thus is happened that two opposite marvels took place at once: the death of all was consummated in the Lord’s body; yet, because the Word was in it, death and corruption were in the same act utterly abolished.*”

Discussion: *Why is it so important that the Son (Christ) be Divine, coequal to Father/Spirit?*

Discussion: *Why is it so important that the Son (Christ) be truly human in His Incarnation?*

Discussion: *How does Athanasius show the importance of sound theology in the church?*

Please send any questions to Matt (matt@sunsetbible.com) or Richard (richard@sunsetbible.com)

¹ Michael Reeves. *Theologians You Should Know: An Introduction: From the Apostolic Fathers to the 21st Century*. 2016. Wheaton Illinois: Crossway.

² Fr. Steve Grunow. *St. Athanasius Against the World*. May 2, 2016. WordonFire.org