

Teaching Theologically: Accurate Teaching about Jesus

Listening Guide

Early Roman Reactions to Jesus

- Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus wrote in AD 49. He described how Emperor Claudius expelled the Jewish people from Rome. The Bible mentions this expulsion in Acts 18:2. We learn from this quote that Claudius expelled the Jews because of heated disputes over a person named Chrestus, likely Christ. Christianity was obviously an often-debated topic in the ancient world.
- Tacitus was a famous Roman historian. In AD 64, 15 years after Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome, Nero was in power. In this quote, Tacitus reveals how first-century Romans tended to view Christianity.
- Pliny was a Roman noble who for a time governed what is modern-day Turkey. He desired to gain information about the early Christian movement so that he might understand it better. Pliny's ultimate goal was to pressure the Christians to profess the emperor as divine. This quote discloses what Pliny discovered about the early Christians. Significantly, Pliny concluded that the early Christians worshiped Christ as a divine being.

Alexamenos Graffito

- This graffiti was discovered in Rome. It likely dates to 220 A.D.

The Son As Eternal

- These verses all express the deity of the Son. Consider the following:
 - John 1:1-18:
 - Affirmation of eternal existence ("in the beginning").
 - Affirmation of eternal relationship ("with God at God's side").
 - Affirmation of eternal identity (the Son is identified with God in 1:1, 1:2, 1:18).
 - Col 1:15-20
 - First born? The language here does not mean that Jesus was a creature; rather, it means that he has authority and prominence over all. The text states that all things were created by Christ and that he is before all things.
 - Heb 1:1-3
 - The language here explicitly says that the Son is the exact imprint of God's hypostasis, of God's nature.
 - Titus 2:13
 - The Son is said to be both "God" and "savior"
 - 1 Cor 8:6

- The Shema was an important Jewish confession of monotheism. The text originally appeared in the Old Testament in Deut 6:4. Here, Paul repeats the Shema but adds the Son into the monotheistic formula. Paul confesses the Son as eternal God but still sees himself as retaining monotheism.

The Son as God Incarnate

- Consider how “human” the Scripture portrays Jesus. He could get tired, weary, angry, etc. His human nature was just like ours—but without sin.

Unhelpful Tendencies #1

- Arianism was a heresy in the early church that denied the Son as being eternal God. Jehovah’s Witnesses today share many of the same teachings as the Arian movement.
- Docetism was a heresy in the early church that denied the Son took on actual human flesh. Docetism taught that Jesus was more like a phantom, a ghost, who just appeared to be human.

Unhelpful Tendencies #2

- Nestorius denied Christ’s unity. He unhelpfully split the divine nature and human nature of Christ.
- Eutyches is associated with the teaching that Jesus’s human nature and divine nature “fused” together to create a new nature. This teaching unhelpfully blurs the distinctions between humanity and deity in Christ.
- The orthodox position says that mysteriously Jesus’ humanity and deity exist united in one person—but that deity retains the properties of deity and humanity retains the properties of humanity.

Questions for Discussion

- 1). What Christological errors do you presently see in your ministry context? These could be errors about Christ that you see in your church or your local neighborhood. How might you address these issues with love and grace?
- 2) How might we best preach and teach the identity of Christ in a pastorally compelling way? What does it mean that Jesus felt all of the normal human experiences that face? How might we share this fact in a pastorally sensitive and encouraging way?
- 3) How can we best retain the unity of Christ’s person in our teaching? Are there any rhetorical moves that we make that sound Nestorian? That is, do we at times unintentionally divide the person of Christ by presenting deity and humanity as separate, not together in one unified person?