

**HEROES AND HERETICS:**  
**An 8-Week Course on Early Church History**

**WEEK 9**            **April 24, 2016**  
**Teacher:**        **Pastor Pickens**

**Leo – Encouragement in Christ**

**Life:**

- We know very little about Leo's early life or family life. He was probably born around 400 AD in Tuscany, Italy.
- Ministering and gaining prominence during the time of the controversy over Nestorianism. Nestorius was condemned at the Council of Ephesus (431).
- In 440 AD Leo was named bishop of Rome. 4 years later he would be named the head of the Roman Church in the West. At this point the Roman Empire had two Emperors, one in the west (Valentinian III) and one in the east (Theodosius II).
- In 446 Flavian was appointed bishop in Constantinople. At that point the heresy of Eutychianism came into prominence.
- Synod at Constantinople in 448 – condemned Eutyches. The 'robber council' a year later condemned Flavian. Leo sent Flavian an incredibly encouraging and theologically rich letter which has now become known as Leo's Tome.
- The next year a new Emperor took reign in the East (Marcian). In 451 a new Council convened at Chalcedon. All 520 bishops voted in the affirmative to accept the Chalcedonian Creed as an authoritative statement of orthodoxy on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 451 AD.
- "We should know of Leo and his wisdom and courage. We should know of Flavian and his sacrifice of his very life. Not because Leo and Flavian should be exalted, but because they so well articulated Christ and his sacrifice for us and for our salvation."<sup>1</sup> After the vote a cry rang out: "St. Peter has spoken through Leo!"
- Leo rebuked those who tried to reconcile worship of Christ with sun-worship.
- In 452 Leo had a meeting with Attila the Hun, who withdrew his troops afterward.
- 455 – Leo minimized the damage in Rome after its capture by the Vandal leader Gaiseric.
- Leo passed away on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 461.

**Thought:**

- Leo seemed to understand the position of the bishop to be both religious and political. There is a strong movement of power to the Bishop of Rome and Leo accepts this and even seems to acknowledge it as appropriate.
- Leo's greatest contribution to the church comes by means of his thoughts about Christology. Especially significant given the time period is the emphasis that Leo places on Christ being one person having two natures. The phrase hypostatic union is held forth by Leo (Acts 20:28; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3). "Chalcedon recognized that when you're dealing with the person of Christ, you're dealing with a mystery."<sup>2</sup>
- Leo recognized that if we compromise anything about the person or nature of our Savior then we compromise salvation. "Any compromise in Christ's full humanity threatened Christ's work of redemption...In Leo's thinking, a proper view of the incarnation leads to a proper view of the atonement. The reverse also happens to be true. "Estimate this atonement at its right worth," Leo warns. Failing to see Christ as the God-man diminishes the worth of the atonement."<sup>3</sup>
- Leo was a powerful and purposeful theologian. His theology though was never separate from his living or his pastoral intentions for his people. Christ and the atonement that he's accomplished have everything to

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<sup>1</sup> Nichols, 117

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 113

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 115

do with how we understand ourselves and how we live. In him we have our life, identity, and are enabled for living. "For we should not now be able to overcome the author of sin and death unless He took our nature on Him and made it His own, whom neither sin could pollute nor death retain."<sup>4</sup>

**Take Away:**

- We should be conscious that God uses us in the lives of others and uses us in their lives as well (Eph. 4:1-16; Prov. 27; James 5:19-20; Phil. 1:25-26; 4:14-23).
- There is great mystery in the gospel. How Christ can have two natures in one person is beyond our comprehension in some ways (Heb. 1-2; Col. 1-2). Mystery is not incompatible with true and intimate knowledge.
- Our faith in Christ extends to every area of our lives. Compartmentalization does not accord with Christianity. Our faith impacts our vocation, our friendships, our political stances, our dreams and aspirations (Titus 2-3; 1 Peter 2; Eph. 5-6).

**For Further Reading:**

Dowley, Tim. *The History of Christianity*. Minneapolis: Lion Publishing, 1990.

Nichols, Stephen J. *For Us and for Our Salvation*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007.

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<sup>4</sup> Leo's Tome