



Lesson 5. Comparing the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds

Introduction

There are three ecumenical (universal) creeds confessed by all of Christendom: the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian creeds. As we've seen each creed has its own history and purpose.

5.1 The Contents of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds

Compare the texts of the Apostles' Creed with the Nicene Creed of 325. (You will probably notice immediately that the creed approved by the council in 325, as given below, is not identical with the Nicene Creed we recite in church today. That difference will be discussed in a future lesson.)

The Apostles' Creed	The Nicene Creed of 325
I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.	We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things seen and unseen.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,	And [we believe] in one Lord, Jesus Christ the Son of God,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead.	begotten of the Father, the only-begotten, that is, of the essence of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being [<i>homoousios</i> - <i>homoiousios</i> - <i>hepastasis</i>] with the Father. Through him all things were made, the things in heaven and on earth. For us and for our salvation he came down and was incarnate, and became truly human. He suffered; on the third day he rose again;

<p>He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.</p> <p>From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.</p>	<p>He ascended into heaven;</p> <p>He will come to judge the living and the dead.</p>
I believe in the Holy Spirit;	And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit.
<p>the holy Christian Church,</p> <p>the communion of saints;</p> <p>the forgiveness of sins;</p> <p>the resurrection of the body;</p> <p>and the life everlasting.</p>	
	<p>The catholic and apostolic church condemns those who say concerning the Son of God that “there was a time when he was not” or “he did not exist before he was begotten” or “he came to be from nothing” or who claim that he is of another subsistence or essence or a creation or changeable or alterable.</p>

1. Identify the phrases in the Nicene Creed of 325 that were included to clarify the proper teaching in opposition to Arius.
2. The last paragraph of the creed of 325 consists of a series of condemnations (called *anathemas* in Greek). Why do you think that paragraph was added rather than having just a positive summary of the correct teaching? Can you think of any other examples from church history when anathemas were proclaimed?
 - We likewise reject and condemn all other papistic abuses of this Sacrament, as the abomination of the sacrifice of the mass for the living and dead. (Formula of Concord, SD, VII.2)
 - Also, that contrary to the public command and institution of Christ only one form of the Sacrament is administered to the laity... (Formula of Concord, SD, VII.3)
 - We reject any worship that is not directed to the triune God as revealed in the Bible. We reject the use of feminine names and pronouns for God because in Scripture God reveals himself as Father and Son. We reject the opinion that all religions lead to the same God. (From “This We Believe” I. 14)

5.2 The Nicene Christology

The new creed did not answer all the questions about the relationship between the Father and the Son, but it did clarify what Scripture teaches. First of all, because the Son is “begotten of the

Father,” it can be said that he has the same essence (or “being”) as the Father. Apart from Jesus being conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the *begetting* of the Son cannot be a temporal concept either, for Scripture makes it clear that the Son is eternal; he has always existed and was already present at creation. Thus, the Father did not exist before the Son. The *begetting* also means that the Son is not created like other beings. And since he is from the Father, he does not come *from nothing*, as is true with the created world.

Does this all make sense? Not entirely. Our minds can’t understand how it can be true that the Son was begotten and, at the same time, that he coexisted with the Father from eternity. But Scripture teaches both of these truths, so the Nicene council accepted both of them. In doing so, it reinforced an important aspect of Christian teaching: Scripture is to be believed even when it doesn’t make sense according to our human reason. That is why we can call many church teachings “mysteries”: that God could become man; that God could die on the cross; that the death of Christ can atone for the sins of the whole world; that water plus the Word can wash away sins; that we receive Christ’s body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. We believe these and other truths because the Bible teaches them. By teaching that the Son was equal to his Father and equally eternal, the Council of Nicaea set an example of how the church must stand by biblical teaching even when it is beyond our rational understanding.

Closing Thought and Prayer

Next Time: Nicaea and Its Aftermath to 381