

Opening slide

EPSOM Module 5: Early Church History

Week two: The Nicene Creed and Council.

**The Nicene Creed (Traditional English Form)**

**We believe in one God,**

**the Father Almighty,**

**Maker of heaven and earth,**

**of all things visible and invisible.**

**And in one Lord Jesus Christ,**

**the only-begotten Son of God,**

**begotten of the Father before all worlds;**

**God from God, Light from Light,**

**true God from true God;**

**begotten, not made,**

**being of one substance with the Father,**

**through whom all things were made.**

**Who for us men and for our salvation**

**came down from heaven,**

**and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary,**

**and was made man.**

**He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;**

**He suffered and was buried.**

**On the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures;**

**He ascended into heaven**

**and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead,  
and His kingdom will have no end.  
And we believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord and giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],  
who with the Father and the Son together  
is worshiped and glorified,  
who spoke by the prophets.  
And we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead  
and the life of the world to come.  
Amen.**

## **Slide 2**

The Nicene Creed was first formulated at the **Council of Nicaea in AD 325** and later expanded at the **Council of Constantinople** in AD 381, particularly clarifying **the doctrine of the Holy Spirit**.

The word doctrine simply means what the entirety of scripture says about a topic

We must rightly divide the word of truth, one of the biggest problems of the church and the cause for so many denominational divisions is the factor of man creating doctrines based off of one sides views of scripture not taking the entirety of the scriptures into account.

“Why did the early church leaders recognize the urgency for this creed to be established, because they wanted the church to have a unified understanding of the doctrine of the trinity.

Why the Nicene Creed Matters Theologically

## 1. It Defends the Deity of Christ

It affirms that Jesus is as the creed states:

**“True God from true God”**

It means:

- The Son shares the exact same divine nature as the Father.
- Jesus is eternal, just like the Father.
- He is not a created being.

The creed continues the thought with:

**“Begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.”**

The Greek phrase behind this is *homoousios* (ὁμοούσιος), meaning “of the same essence” or “same substance.”

Why the Early Church Used This Phrase

The phrase was written to directly oppose the teaching of Arianism.

- **“Begotten, not made”**
- **“Of one substance with the Father”**

This aligns with scriptures like:

***John 1:1***- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

***Colossians 2:9*** - “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”

***Hebrews 1:3*** - “And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

## **2. It Defends the Trinity**

**The creed clearly confesses belief in:**

- **The Father**
- **The Son**
- **The Holy Spirit**

**Each person is affirmed as divine.**

### **Slide 3**

**In the early church, a major false teaching arose through a man named Arius.**

**He taught that:**

- **Jesus was created by God**
- **Jesus was not eternal**
- **Jesus was less than the Father**

**This teaching is known as Arianism.**

### **Slide 4**

**The emperor Constantine the Great convened the Council of Nicaea primarily because of the growing conflict over Arianism.**

**Why Constantine Called the Council**

#### **1. Arianism Was Dividing the Church**

**The teaching of Arius had spread rapidly:**

- **Churches were splitting**
- **Bishops were in conflict**
- **Entire regions were divided**

**This wasn't just theological—it became a public controversy across the empire.**

## **2. Constantine Wanted Unity in the Empire**

**Constantine had recently legalized Christianity (Edict of Milan, AD 313).**

**Now Christianity was no longer persecuted—it was becoming a unifying force in the Roman Empire.**

**But Arianism threatened that unity.**

**👉 Division in the church = instability in the empire**

**So Constantine stepped in—not as a theologian, but as a political and administrative leader seeking unity.**

## **3. The Council's Purpose**

**He gathered bishops from across the empire to:**

- **Settle the dispute about the nature of Christ**
- **Establish a unified teaching**
- **Restore peace and unity in the church**

**Important Clarification (Very Important 🔥 )**

**Constantine did NOT create doctrine.**

**He:**

- **Called the meeting**
- **Facilitated unity**

**But the bishops:**

- **debated Scripture**
- **defended apostolic teaching**
- **produced the creed**

👉 The doctrine came from Scripture and the church, not from Constantine.

### What the Council Decided

The council rejected Arianism and affirmed:

- Jesus is eternal
- Jesus is fully God
- Jesus is of the same essence (homoousios) as the Father

“Constantine called the council—but he didn’t write the creed. The church defended what Scripture had already declared.

This creed Summarizes the Gospel

It outlines the entire gospel narrative:

1. Incarnation
2. Crucifixion
3. Resurrection
4. Ascension
5. Second Coming
6. Final Judgment

### Slide 5

Let’s Take a Moment: Homoousios (ὁμοούσιος)

This single word changed everything.

Homoousios means:

👉 **“Of the same substance”**

👉 **“Of the same essence”**

**The Nicene Creed declares that the Son is:**

**“Of one substance with the Father”**

**Why This Word Matters**

**This was not philosophical language—it was defensive language.**

**The early church used this word to draw a hard line against false teaching.**

**Because Arianism was saying:**

- **Jesus is similar to God**
- **Jesus is like God**
- **Jesus is created by God**

**But the church responded:**

👉 **No—He is not like God... He is God.**

**The Difference Is Everything**

**What This Means About Jesus**

**Because of homoousios:**

- **Jesus is not created**
- **Jesus is not lesser**
- **Jesus is not a secondary being**

**He is:**

- **Co-eternal with the Father**
- **Equal in nature**
- **Fully God**

## **Slide 6**

### **Scriptural Foundation**

**This wasn't invented—it was pulled from Scripture:**

- **Gospel of John 1:1 → “the Word was God”**
- **Colossians 2:9 → “all the fullness of Deity”**
- **Hebrews 1:3 → “exact representation”**

### **Why This Matters for Salvation 🔥**

**If Jesus is not homoousios with the Father:**

- **Then He is not fully God**
- **Then His sacrifice is not infinite**
- **Then salvation is not secure**

**👉 Only God can save.**

### **Teaching Line 🔥**

**“Jesus is not similar to God—He is the same in essence as God.”**

**The trinity is a core doctrine in the church. Notice the deity of the father is never a question, nor is the deity of the Holy Spirit, but only the son.**

**As we covered last week and will cover just for a moment the hypostatic union (hypostasis) is a vital doctrine in the Christian faith. As it explains the Christ and the relationship between His humanity and divinity.**

**Leviticus says in 17:11 that the life is in the blood. If Christ was not God he would have no eternal properties to his blood that was shed and therefore could not atone for my sins eternally. On the other hand if he was not fully man he could not carry out a life that was sin free because he would not face it like I do.**

**For Christ's blood to be of an eternal substance and his sacrifice to be valid he would have to be eternal and have to overcome the flesh.**

**And important part of the creed is the Latin phrase “filioque” meaning and the son.**

**The phrase “Filioque” is Latin for:**

**👉 “and the Son”**

**It was added to the section of the creed about the Holy Spirit:**

**“who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]”**

## **Slide 7**

**What Does “Filioque” Mean?**

**The original creed (AD 325 / 381) stated:**

**👉 The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father**

**Later, the Western Church added:**

**👉 The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father AND the Son**

**Why Was It Added?**

**The Western Church added the Filioque to protect the full divinity of the Son.**

**It emphasized that:**

- **The Son is equal with the Father**
- **The Son shares in the sending and procession of the Spirit**

**This aligns with passages like:**

- **Gospel of John 15:26 — the Spirit proceeds from the Father**
- **Gospel of John 16:7 — Jesus sends the Spirit**

**Why It Became Controversial**

**The Eastern Church rejected the Filioque for two main reasons:**

**1. Theological Concern**

**They believed:**

**👉 The Father alone is the single source within the Trinity**

**So they argued:**

- **The Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son**

- **Not from both equally**

## **2. Authority Concern**

**The bigger issue:**

👉 **The creed was changed without an ecumenical council**

**The East saw this as:**

- **An unauthorized alteration**
- **A violation of church unity**

**The Result: Division in the Church**

**This disagreement became one of the major issues leading to the:**

👉 **Great Schism**

- **Western Church (Roman Catholic) → accepted Filioque**
- **Eastern Church (Orthodox) → rejected it**

**What This Means Theologically**

**The Filioque debate is about:**

👉 **How the persons of the Trinity relate to one another**

**Both sides agree:**

- **The Father is God**
- **The Son is God**
- **The Spirit is God**

**But they differ on:**

👉 **How the Spirit proceeds**

- **The West emphasizes unity of essence**

- **The East emphasizes distinction of persons and origin**

**“The Filioque wasn’t about whether the Spirit is God—it was about how the Spirit relates within the Trinity.”**

**“The early church fought over one phrase because they understood—if you distort the relationships within the Trinity, you distort the nature of God.”**

### **Slide 8**

**“In recent years, the Catholic Church has maintained the Filioque doctrinally, but has shown flexibility in how it is expressed—especially in efforts toward unity with the Eastern Church.”**

**I have friends who are catholic and who are orthodox and to see the eastern and western church’s attempt to heal of her schisms is truly amazing.**

**Before 1054, the Church was still recognized as one universal body, even though cultural and theological tensions between East and West were already present.”**

### **Why This Matters**

- **The creed says “one Church” for a reason**
- **Division was not the original design**
- **The split was historical, not biblical**

**“There was one Church with two expressions—until division turned distinction into separation. The early Church confessed unity—but history revealed how fragile that unity could become.”**

**Arianism didn’t die—it just changed forms.**

**Modern versions show up as:**

- **“Jesus was just a great teacher”**
- **“Jesus is not fully God”**

- **“Jesus is a created being”**

**Same spirit, different language**

**“Arianism didn’t disappear—it just rebranded.”**

**Just like Gnosticism rebranded as universalism**

## **🔥 5. The Cost of Contending for Truth**

**The early church:**

- **was divided**
- **faced pressure**
- **risked exile and death**

**👉 But they refused to compromise truth**

**That’s what this creed is about preserving truth: this statement of faith stood as the statement of the church not the catholic and orthodox but the church**

**Slide 10**