



Lesson 4. The Content and Use of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed of 325

Introduction

1. LGBT+ "Sparkle Creed" from Edina Community Lutheran Church (ELCA)

"I believe in the non-binary God whose pronouns are plural. I believe in Jesus Christ, their child, who wore a fabulous tunic and had two dads and saw everyone as a sibling-child of God. I believe in the rainbow Spirit, who shatters our image of one white light and refracts it into a rainbow of gorgeous diversity."

"I believe in the church of everyday saints as numerous, creative and resilient as patches on the AIDS quilt, whose feet are grounded in mud and whose eyes gaze at the stars in wonder. I believe in the call to each of us that love is love is love, so beloved, let us love. I believe, glorious God. Help my unbelief."

2. Why do we recite the Nicene Creed on some Sundays and the Apostles' Creed on others?

4.1 The Council and the Creed



Constantine summoned (and paid for) the bishops to meet in A.D. 325 at his summer palace in the city of Nicaea, located on a beautiful lake about 60 miles southeast of present-day Istanbul. It was a pleasant and mid-way location for those traveling by land and sea. Some 250 or more bishops attended, along with their assistants and other priests and observers. The bishops began meeting in late May or early June, with the emperor himself arriving on June 14 for the official opening ceremony.¹

The council adjourned in August after the bishops had remained for the festivities celebrating the 20th anniversary of Constantine's rule. Although detailed minutes of the meetings have not survived, we can piece together what took place from the accounts of several participants and other early church historians.

Arius and Alexander were both present. They and their supporters were given opportunities to speak. Eusebius of Caesarea also presented a creed for consideration, but it was rejected for being

¹ Interestingly Constantine was only present for the opening ceremony. He did not sit on a throne, but a stool and waited for the bishop to give him permission to sit.

insufficiently detailed on the areas of controversy. After days of additional discussion, a creed was adopted on June 19, and some 230 bishops signed their names to the document to show their agreement. Only a handful of bishops, including Arius, refused to sign and were deposed from office.

4. Some Christians, congregations, and church bodies proudly say that they have “no creed but the Bible.” Do you agree that this is a good position to hold? Why or why not?

5. Eusebius’ creed seemed very orthodox. What differences do you note with regards to his confession of the Son? Why do you suppose his creed was rejected by the council but not deemed heretical? Is it proper to reject a statement that sounds biblical on the grounds that it is insufficient? Why or why not?

Eusebius of Caesarea’s Creed	Nicene Creed
<p>And [we believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God from God, Light from Light, Life from Life,</p> <p>Only-begotten Son, first-born of every creature, begotten from the Father before all the ages,</p> <p>by whom also all things were made; who for our salvation was made flesh, and lived among men, and suffered, and rose again the third day, and ascended to the Father, and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.</p>	<p>And [we believe] in one Lord, Jesus Christ the Son of God, Light from Light, true God from true God,</p> <p>begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.</p> <p>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 fully human. He suffered; on the third day he rose again; He ascended into heaven; He will come to judge the living and the dead.</p>

6. Our society produces many examples of sermons, podcasts, and songs that use biblical ideas and terminology but in a vague or superficial way (e.g. “I have decided to follow Jesus.” “We’re all God’s children.” “God is love.”) Should we like or share such ideas, or is there some danger in doing so? Defend your answer.

4.2 The Contents of the Creed

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. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and 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; He ascended into heaven; He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit;	And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit.
the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins;	

the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.	
	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.

7. Identify the phrases in the Nicene Creed of 325 that were included to clarify the proper teaching in opposition to Arius.
8. 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)

4.3 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

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